DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 473 746 CG 032 061

AUTHOR	James, Pauline; St. Leger, Pam; Ward, Kevin
TITLE	Making Connections: The Evaluation of the Victorian Full Service Schools Program.
INSTITUTION	Australian Commonwealth Dept. of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Canberra.
PUB DATE	2001-05-00
NOTE	244p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Department of Education & Training, GPO Box 4367, Melbourne VIC 3001, Australia. For full text: http://www.successfullearning.com.au/connections_new_web.pdf.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses (070) -- Reports - Evaluative (142)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC10 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Dropout Prevention; Dropouts; Foreign Countries; High Risk Students; *High School Students; High Schools; *Program Effectiveness; Program Evaluation; *Transitional Programs
IDENTIFIERS	Australia (Victoria); School Based Services

ABSTRACT

The objective of the Australian Commonwealth's Full Service Schools (FSS) Program has been to provide additional support to schools to develop innovative programs and arrangements that address the specific needs of students who are considered at risk of not completing Year 12 to a satisfactory level. The target group has been students primarily 16 to 17 years of age at risk of not completing Year 12 or not making a successful transition from school to further education, training or employment. The FSS Program, which operated in 1999 and 2000, was funded by the Commonwealth Government. The evaluation was an action research project designed to find out what curriculum programs and arrangements engaged the young people who participated in the Victorian FSS Program. It documents a range of approaches which encouraged young people to reconnect to education. By listening to the views of these young people, their teachers and other community members, the researchers have written a report which analyzes the strengths of many aspects of the FSS Program. The findings show that it was a Program which had significant benefits for many students who were unlikely to stay on at school. Nine appendixes are included containing program questionnaires and data summaries. (Contains 57 references.) (GCP)

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PAULINE JAMES PAM ST LEGER KEVIN WARD

MAKING CONNECTIONS

The Evaluation of the Victorian Full Service Schools Program

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Making Connections

The Evaluation of the Victorian Full Service Schools Program

Pauline James
Pam St Leger
Kevin Ward

Department of Education, Employment and Training
Victoria
May 2001

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ISBN 0 7594 0184 5

Published by the Post Compulsory Pathways and Projects Division
Department of Education, Employment and Training, Victoria
2 Treasury Place, East Melbourne

FOREWORD

The objective of the Commonwealth's Full Service Schools (FSS) Program has been to provide additional support to schools to develop innovative programs and arrangements that address the specific needs of students who are considered at risk of not completing Year 12 to a satisfactory level. The target group has been students primarily 16 to 17 years of age at risk of not completing Year 12 or not making a successful transition from school to further education, training or employment. The FSS Program which operated in 1999 and 2000 was funded by the Commonwealth Government.

The evaluation was an action research project designed to find out what curriculum programs and arrangements engaged the young people who participated in the Victorian FSS Program. It documents a range of approaches which encouraged young people to reconnect to education. By listening to the views of these young people, their teachers and other community members, the researchers have written a report which analyses the strengths of many aspects of the FSS Program. The findings show that it was a Program which had significant benefits for many students who were unlikely to stay on at school.

This report is published in the Successful Learning Publication series to add to the body of knowledge about what connects young people to learning. It is funded by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

As Chair of the Victorian FSS Steering Committee I thank the members of the committee for supporting the evaluation project and for their interest in its findings. I particularly commend the professionalism and expertise of Dr Pauline James, Ms Pam St Leger and Associate Professor Kevin Ward from the University of Melbourne, who undertook the research and writing of the report.

The report provides a rich resource for all those in Victoria and elsewhere who are determined to meet the learning needs of young people in the post compulsory years of education and training.

HOWARD KELLY
General Manager
Post Compulsory Pathways
and Projects Division
May 2001

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors of the report wish to acknowledge the vital assistance and support afforded by the key contact people for each of the eight Full Service Schools (FSS) Program Areas. They are:

Ballarat	Margaret Stewart
Bendigo	Vern Healey
Brimbank/Hume	Professor Maureen Ryan
Casey/Dandenong	Richard Percy
Darebin/Moreland	Ben Pollard, Wendy Pitt
East Gippsland/Latrobe/Wellington	Jenny Marshall
Frankston/Peninsula	Keith White
Greater Geelong	David Gallagher

We would also like to thank all the Area Network Committee members who gave of their valuable time in participating so fully in focus group meetings. We are also much indebted to the Action Research Facilitators in each region, whose case studies are presented in Chapter 6 of this report and who conducted the student focus group meetings. They are:

Ballarat	Leann Brown, University of Ballarat
Bendigo	Dr Michael Faulkner, La Trobe University
Brimbank/Hume	Gerard Stafford, Brigidine Schools Council
Casey/Dandenong	Barbara Fairweather, Chisholm Institute
Darebin/Moreland	Marilyn Kell, Private Consultant
East Gippsland/Latrobe/ Wellington	Leanne Healey, East Gippsland Institute of TAFE
Frankston/Peninsula	Dr Jeff Northfield, Private Consultant
Greater Geelong	Dr Colin Henry, Deakin University

To teachers and other personnel who volunteered to become action research team members we extend much appreciation for their dedication to evaluate and contribute to the knowledge base of full service schooling. We would also like to thank: school principals who gave permission for the evaluation to be conducted in their schools; students who agreed to be members of focus groups; students, teachers and parents who participated in a variety of ways in the action research; and teachers who responded so thoughtfully to the questionnaires. We are also particularly appreciative of the cooperation of Paul Weight, Coordinator of BAYSA School Support Programs in the Geelong Region, for organising our visit to BAYSA and allowing us to speak with students and a range of personnel associated with BAYSA's services. We would also like to thank the Victorian FSS Program Steering

Committee who gave us timely support and guidance, the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) for funding this evaluation, and particularly Jill Anwyl, for her unfailing willingness to facilitate the evaluation in ways too numerous to mention.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The Full Service Schools (FSS) Program, initially called the Full Service Schools for Students At Risk Program, was a two year initiative funded by the Commonwealth. It was designed to address the Commonwealth Government's priority of reducing youth unemployment by encouraging young people under 18 to remain at or to return to school to complete Year 12. Its objective was to provide additional support to schools to develop innovative programs and arrangements that addressed the specific needs of students considered at risk of not completing Year 12 to a satisfactory level. In July 1998, data were analysed to determine the highest priority areas for locating projects in the Victorian Full Service Schools Program. Eight Program Areas were selected, namely: Ballarat, Bendigo, Brimbank/Hume, Casey/Dandenong, Darebin/Moreland, East Gippsland/Latrobe/ Wellington, Frankston/Peninsula and Greater Geelong. Schools were invited to express interest in being involved in the FSS Program. Area Network Committees were then established to bring together the schools and other key players in each area and to devise Area Programs consisting of projects and programs to meet the needs of at risk students in the particular area. In general, programs and projects in each of the 8 areas commenced in mid 1999.

The main aims of the evaluation of the Victorian Full Service Schools Program were to: identify the critical success factors in the projects and programs; ascertain how schools, training providers and local agencies have worked together to make these a success; identify those elements that would lead to further improvement; explore the enabling of local linkages and cooperation between schools, training providers and local agencies in keeping at risk students in education and training; and identify those critical infrastructures and resources needed to sustain projects and programs that work. What helps to make positive connections between students at risk and their schools and how can these be enabled by connections between schools and other agencies and organisations?

The evaluation was largely qualitative. Data collection was undertaken using two major surveys of school and Area Network personnel, and focus group meetings with Area Network Committees and groups of students participating in an 'alternative' FSS Program project or program in each region. Action research teams of teachers, led by a regional facilitator, were also established in each area to explore the effectiveness of projects and programs and recommend improvements.

Findings and Recommendations for Policy and Practice

1. Potential early school leavers are a diverse group. While some may have a history of academic failure, and/or behavioural difficulties, others may be succeeding reasonably well in school but have to 'drop out' because family and other support structures are absent. Loss of family support has many ramifications for a young person's achievement in school and, indeed, a web of mutually influencing factors may lead to a decision to leave. Early intervention (from Years 7 and 8) is vital in preventing initial problems from becoming more serious.

Recommendation 1

That the use of current indicators and procedures for identifying potential early leavers, through a variety of coordination and assessment functions within schools (for example, pastoral groups, welfare and year level coordination, feeder school reports) be strengthened and extended to ensure that early assessments and prompt interventions are made, accompanied by appropriate advice for students and their parents.

2. Many types of projects and programs have the capacity to engage young people, foster employability skills and encourage them to change their attitudes to continuing in school. For success, such projects and programs need to include:
   - personal support (by individual adults, for example, youth workers, case managers, teachers, and supportive environments in the classroom and the workplace);
   - inclusive and differentiated curriculum designed around group and individual student needs and capacities (for example, referring particular students to external agencies and organisations for specific programs, or providing school-based, often practical, hands-on programs into which students self-select); and
   - regular, relevant work experience.

Recommendation 2

That schools be supported to identify the needs and capacities of individual potential early school leavers so that they can develop a comprehensive range of services, courses and programs for both individuals and groups. Funding for personnel especially designated to coordinate and undertake this crucial work within the school (for example, case managers, youth workers, student welfare and VET coordinators) should be a priority.

3. Critical success factors in alternative programs are:
   - extra help in small classes (a maximum of 20 students), with teachers who are friendly, caring, patient and sensitive, listen well and use positive discipline;

- activities that build confidence; these might include contributing to program development, engaging in 'public' speaking, expressing opinions that are taken seriously, 'adventure' activities and preparing for job interviews;
- activities that provide opportunities for 'success' experiences;
- positive relationships between the students and the adults involved;
- opportunities to learn new life and work skills;
- personal development activities that enhance self and cultural awareness;
- opportunities to make new friends and learn 'people skills' for team-work and family and school life, enhancing a feeling of connectedness to school;
- activities and subjects that are clearly seen to be helpful for the future, for example, vocationally oriented programs and work placements; and
- counselling and medical, financial and legal advice, as appropriate.

Recommendation 3

That particular attention be given to providing students at risk with smaller classes (a maximum of 20 students), and a small group of selected teachers with whom they can develop close, positive relationships. A secure environment and challenging activities that engage every facet of the young person's intellectual, emotional and social development need to be provided.

4. Where choices to enter alternative programs, or shape them in a particular direction, are provided for young people, they respond more positively to the process of entry and, often, to the programs themselves. Also, many of these programs are valuable for all students and those who do not participate may feel 'short-changed' and miss important opportunities.

Recommendation 4

That students (and their parents) be involved in electing to participate in alternative programs. Even if recommended to students as a very good option for them, the element of choice needs to be maintained. In addition, alternative programs and pathways need to be more widely advertised, and treated as a normal part of school provision (for example, through letters to all parents and information evenings) so that all students can benefit from the opportunities provided and community attitudes towards such programs can be influenced. Similarly, the process of choosing needs to be built into the programs themselves (for example, choice of work placement, the negotiation of curriculum etc.), to empower students in decision-making and taking control over their own lives, and thus assisting them in the transition to responsible adulthood.

5. Developing and maintaining school and community links are vital in meeting the needs of potential early leavers. Schools alone cannot provide a 'Full Service'. Such links are many and varied and include those with other schools, community agencies, TAFE, the adult education and university sectors, group training organisations and industry. Some students are best served by programs

and personnel being brought into the school (often youth support), thus mainstreaming them. Others benefit by learning to negotiate their way outside the school and the provision of a different setting in which to make a 'fresh start'.

Recommendation 5

That current links with outside agencies and organisations established by schools and Area Networks be maintained and extended, with attempts being made to integrate services and programs comprehensively across a particular region through, for example, Local Learning and Employment Networks as they become operational. Further collaboration between schools should also be sought. Some programs need to be organised within schools, particularly when students are reluctant or afraid to go elsewhere. Others, particularly those associated with vocational learning and education, are often better accessed off-campus, but giving due regard to individual needs and local circumstances.

6. Critical success factors in forming and enabling school and community links include the following:
   - a shared obligation to assist young people and develop clear objectives and goals for the network;
   - a Steering Committee of some kind, to develop joint ownership of the collaborative project, set strategic directions and coordinate continual monitoring of the project;
   - well-established procedures and protocols, acceptable to all parties, to disseminate information about what is occurring for the young people involved, thus promoting good relationships and effective communication;
   - key personnel as 'brokers' (for example, student welfare coordinators, youth workers, case managers, VET coordinators), most productively located for at least some time in the schools, who can make and maintain the links between students, schools and other agencies, who are at ease with all groups and who can translate the language of the agencies and social workers, or TAFEs and industry, into one that teachers can understand;
   - modified school structures and whole school support of the programs being offered, achieved through the professional development of teachers and the leadership of senior personnel; and
   - use of Local Government Area geographical boundaries as a way of designating all the key players at the local level responsible for education and training and youth services if these are to be coordinated.

Recommendation 6

That where schools and other agencies and organisations frequently work together to provide for students at risk, a local Steering Committee be established, to provide conditions for developing joint ownership of the project, common purposes and

understandings, evaluation guidelines and clear protocols and procedures to facilitate communication and good relationships among all parties.

7. Different approaches are used by professionals in working with young people, and shared understandings of each other's culture will not occur without specific strategies being put in place. Interprofessional collaboration is vital in the support of at risk young people.

Recommendation 7

That the employment of youth workers, case managers, student welfare and VET coordinators (or other informed personnel in schools) be continued and extended to assist in making and maintaining links with other agencies and organisations. It should be recognised that their work also includes the professional development of other staff, promoting understanding and communication between all parties, and in maintaining regular contact.

8. The FSS Program attempted to locate responsibility for the sharing of resources, programs and support within a designated Local Government Area or combinations of these. This has allowed new players, such as local government, to take an active role in support of students at risk and has optimised the value of networking across schools and other providers.

Recommendation 8

That Local Government Areas (LGAs) be recognised as the geographical areas where responsibility for youth is located so that services and education and training provision can be aligned. Coordination of a comprehensive range of programs and services in a given area should be a high priority of Local Learning and Employment Networks as they begin operation so that young people have learning experiences and support which help them to be successful.

9. Work placements and work experiences are a crucial component of many alternative programs in developing employability skills that lead to meaningful employment and in changing students' attitudes to school and work. These placements and experiences, however, are not always relevant either to the young person or to the local labour market, and supportive and non-exploitative employers are not always easy to find.

Recommendation 9

That while students should maintain an element of choice in the matter of work placements and experience, schools attempt to ensure that such placements are relevant, supportive and not exploitative of the young people involved. New links between schools and employers, group training companies and employer groups need to be developed, to offer more opportunities for part-time apprenticeships and traineeships. This is particularly crucial in areas of local labour shortages. A variety of strategies also need to be put in place (preparation, mentoring, debriefings etc.) to maximise the educational value of the experience for young people.

10. While some strategies are in place to monitor the progress of early leavers after dropping out of school, this process is somewhat ad hoc. Schools have never had the resources or personnel to undertake this work, nor have they been given this responsibility. Yet such tracking is a vitally important task in understanding young people's employment destinations, in encouraging them to return to school or to undertake further education and training and in preventing some young people from 'falling through the cracks'.

Recommendation 10

That Local Learning and Employment Networks facilitate collaboration across schools and other agencies, to maintain contact with young people who have left school before the end of Year 12. Skilled personnel, funding and other resources are needed. Although such designated groups may vary across regions, DEET should be involved in coordinating this effort and ensure that appropriate funding is provided. Collaborative arrangements are to be preferred over individual responsibility that tends to rely on the goodwill of already overworked staff.

11. The most desirable situation for potential early leavers is one in which flexible, multiple, interacting curriculum pathways are provided by schools and outside agencies and organisations, with all of these pathways being seen as equally valid educational offerings to be financed by the school. Structural changes such as timetabling to accommodate work placements and agency programs, and whole school policies concerning discipline and welfare, need to support these pathways. This situation can dispel the problems of labelling and the acquisition of negative identities for students in alternative programs that are seen as marginal to mainstream school life. This flexibility appears to be rare, however, and for its realisation, requires considerable cultural and structural change to occur within most schools.

Recommendation 11

That schools work towards developing flexible, multiple, interacting curriculum pathways in conjunction with other schools, agencies and organisations, and adopt new strategies for monitoring and assessing students at risk. Thus alternative programs should become central to mainstream curriculum rather than supplementary. These curriculum pathways need to be supported by appropriate 'whole school' policies and structural changes.

12. Cultural change in schools (and the community) needs to occur on a number of levels. Such change is effected through further involvement of parents and mainstream teachers with alternative program issues and professional development, particularly for those teachers who signal a willingness to participate in some way. Short contact with large numbers of students (both in class and across many classes), however, makes it difficult for mainstream teachers to develop the kinds of relationships necessary for effective learning for students at risk.

Recommendation 12

That professional development for teachers be provided to assist them in communicating constructively with all students and recognising individual differences in needs and learning styles. Such professional development might occur in many ways, as suited to individual teacher needs, for example, through group learning with a facilitator, action research, well-designed program evaluation, mentoring, visiting other classes or schools, or a Statewide Forum, as well as through seminars and workshops. All teachers need to be informed about the positive outcomes of these programs and, in addition, experience the 'pay-offs' for themselves. Such professional development should be supported by funding for time release. Initial teacher education should also give a high priority to teaching students at risk.

13. Structural change and whole school policy revisions need to accompany the provision of alternative pathways for students, if many potential early leavers are not to be labelled, miss important classes and generally become marginalised within the school. Such change is essential to provide smaller classes for students at risk, and a smaller number of teachers to take the major responsibility for them.

Recommendation 13

That schools endeavour to effect structural and whole school change towards accommodating and providing for the needs and capacities of all school students, including those of potential early leavers, by:

- *providing major blocks of time (days, half-days) in which all students and teachers can work together without interruption, thus accommodating off-campus alternative programs and work placements, and allowing good student-teacher relationships to develop;*
- *reducing class sizes, particularly for potential early leavers, so that teachers are able to provide their students with sufficient attention and support;*
- *deploying staff in such a way that only a small core team of people is required to take responsibility for a group of at risk students; and*
- *reconceptualising whole school welfare and discipline policies for the benefit of potential early leavers and mainstream students generally.*

14. Provision for students with very low levels of skill (particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy) is still quite inadequate in most regions. Early intervention is needed and programs designed to incorporate the development of literacy and numeracy skills in a variety of creative ways, while accommodating the differences between individuals and groups. These may involve partnerships with other providers, such as Adult and Community Education. In addition, many teachers are not sufficiently skilled in these areas to be able to assist students adequately.

Recommendation 14

That the assessment of skill levels in literacy and numeracy be strengthened, with the purpose of early intervention for those with difficulties, using programs especially designed to meet the needs of particular groups (and individuals), where possible in partnership with other providers. While the work of designated people (and parents) within schools is crucial, professional development for teachers generally in the area of literacy and numeracy enhancement should also be given priority.

15. Full Service Schools Program funding has led to the following (to different degrees) in many areas:
    - improved retention rates through the re-engagement of potential early leavers;
    - better preparation for students who do leave school;
    - extended curriculum options for students;
    - structural changes, such as re-timetabling and organising smaller class sizes for alternative programs;
    - new positions being created and opportunities for case management;
    - an increase in teacher flexibility generally;
    - acknowledgement and respite for teachers who have been 'battling' for years to provide alternative programs, for example, by providing them with release time;
    - development of important community links;
    - increased community awareness about the need to care for at risk students;
    - increased acceptance of alternative pathways for students; and
    - development of strong learning communities from fragmented networks.

Some of the programs and community-school links already established are sustainable and can be built upon, with a key factor in sustainability being the extent to which there is a shift in school culture to embrace programs for at risk students. In addition, in regions where collaborative development is well advanced, usually provincial centres, working intersectorally has broadened the scope for applying to a range of different funding sources to address common concerns, and community resources appear to be used more effectively as a result of these collaborative efforts.

Yet many Area Programs are in early stages of development, are very dependent on further funding and cannot be sustained without it. Their limited resources are spread too thinly to meet competing demands, affecting other courses and groups of students. They particularly need money to fund: external courses and services for students; case management, involving teacher time and/or the employment of youth workers; alternative programs with smaller groups that require additional teacher time; and transport. Those Area Programs that are better developed need funding to supplement their current pool of resources. The problems of uncertainty, given the short-term nature of much of the funding provided, are also particularly disruptive to programs and thus to the wellbeing of students. Strategic community-

school links take time to develop. In addition, the separation of the responsibilities of the Department of Human Services and the Department of Education, Employment and Training means that policy initiatives and funding arrangements are not coordinated, thus working against a comprehensive 'Full Service' for young people.

Recommendation 15

That further funding be provided, according to particular area requirements, and be committed over a period of at least two years, to resource programs and arrangements that are known to have a positive influence on schools and young people at risk. Funding to increase access to such programs across school communities should be made available, while retaining important features of programs such as small class sizes. The positions of case managers and youth workers in schools must be seen as a funding priority, as should literacy and numeracy programs, and the professional development of teachers towards the acquisition of new skills and attitudes and cultural change within the schools. It is a false economy to deny funding for programs that have such positive social and likely long-term economic outcomes. In addition, coordination of policy initiatives and funding arrangements between the Department of Human Services and the Department of Education, Employment and Training and other relevant departments should be effected.

1 INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

In 1997, the Victorian Department of Education commissioned a series of research and development projects, entitled Successful Learning Projects, which were funded by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA). These projects were primarily to prepare information and advice about current education and training provision for young people who might be expected to remain in school or return to education and training as a result of the introduction of the Youth Allowance. To obtain this Allowance, under-18 year olds needed to engage in full-time education or training or undertake a combination of activities, such as part-time study and voluntary work.

The report of one of these projects (Dwyer et al., 1998), on the basis of interviews and focus groups with numerous school and agency personnel and students, recommended a number of responses both at the system and school/college level to encourage school retention for often embittered young people. These recommendations included: adopting a case management approach involving youth workers; provision of a flexible range of school curriculum options, including life skills and literacy and numeracy programs – with accompanying timetabling and staffing changes; and increased access for young people to other sectors, such as Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and Adult and Community Education (ACE).

On the basis of a study of a wide variety of school-based, TAFE-based and community-based programs, the report of another of these projects (Ward et al., 1998) also provided suggestions concerning successful learning programs – in designing them to encourage young people either to remain in school or to undertake further education and training elsewhere. The main recommendations of this report were that successful learning programs:

- require an adult learning environment for the young people involved;
- identify an individual's entry level and articulate an agreed series of involvements, with an outcome that leads somewhere personally significant;
- are resourced so that they can provide continuous staffing for the life-cycle of a project or series of projects; and
- explicitly show how projects connect with each other and with wider related agencies, in a way that best meets local needs and resources.

The Full Service Schools (FSS) Program, initially called the Full Service Schools for Students At Risk Program, which is the subject of this evaluation, was a two year initiative funded by the Commonwealth Government. It was designed to address the Commonwealth Government's priority of reducing youth unemployment by encouraging young people under 18 to remain at or to return to school to complete Year 12. Its objective was to provide additional support to

schools to develop innovative programs and arrangements that addressed the specific needs of students considered at risk of not completing Year 12 to a satisfactory level. In July 1998, data were analysed to determine the highest priority areas for locating projects in the Victorian Full Service Schools Program. Eight Program Areas, based on local government areas or combinations, were selected, namely: Ballarat, Bendigo, Brimbank/Hume, Casey/Dandenong, Darebin/ Moreland, East Gippsland/Latrobe/Wellington, Frankston/Peninsula and Greater Geelong. Schools were invited to express interest in being involved in the FSS Program.

Following briefings in each of the areas, schools together with other education, training and employment stakeholders were asked to establish Area Network Committees, to devise projects[1] and programs suitable to meet the needs of 16 and 17 year olds by adopting many of the recommendations of the reports mentioned above.

Each Program Area was asked to develop project proposals within a notional entitlement of $440,000 over 1999-2000 (with Ballarat and Bendigo allocated half this amount plus an administrative cost). Project proposals were submitted to the Department of Education, Training and Youth affairs (DETYA) for approval and after some months of delay, projects became operational in mid 1999.

EVALUATION AIMS

The main aims of the evaluation were to:

- identify the critical success factors in current projects and programs that engage and retain potential early school leavers in education and training and encourage early school leavers to return to school;
- ascertain how schools, training providers and local agencies have worked together to make these projects and programs a success;
- identify what elements of the projects and programs were being modified to achieve intended outcomes;
- identify those elements that would lead to further improvement in the projects and programs;
- explore the enabling of local linkages and cooperation between schools, training providers and local agencies in keeping at risk students in education and training; and
- identify those critical infrastructures and resources needed to sustain projects and programs that work.

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[1] Area Programs included projects conducted across a number of schools as well as alternative programs within or external to the schools.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The evaluation was largely qualitative (see Owen and Rogers, 1999; Wadsworth, 1991), although some descriptive statistics are employed for the questionnaire data. It also involved an action research component. Thus, the evaluation was designed to explore the current Area Programs recently established in the regions and provide information on their effectiveness. However, by involving Area Network Committees and action research teams in the evaluation, it was also designed to stimulate and effect improvements in the Programs and thus directly assist in providing more adequate education and training provision in Victoria for the future[2]. In developing an understanding of the factors leading to success, the intention was also to make a valuable contribution to the wider national picture of provision for students at risk.

The evaluation had three main components:

1. Clarification of purposes and methodology with evaluation stakeholders, by attending an interregional meeting to develop understanding of Area Programs (their focuses, assumptions and goals) and the local issues and questions to be addressed in the evaluation. Each Area Program was also investigated through the documentation provided by each region to the Department of Education, Employment and Training (DEET).

2. Statewide data collection in each region[3], to operate in parallel with action research teams. This involved, as described below, the use of (i) two questionnaires; (ii) audiotaped focus group meetings with each Area Network Committee; and (iii) audiotaped focus group meetings with students considered at risk in each region (see Appendices 1-3 for, respectively, questionnaires and Area Network Committee and student focus group questions).

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[2] Since the Commonwealth Government decided not to continue the FSS Program and funding, unless further alternative sources of revenue are made available, this intention is unlikely to be realised.

[3] The Ballarat Area Network Committee decided, as one of its Area Program projects, to undertake 'Action Research' to evaluate its Area Program. (Part of the account of this Ballarat-based action research is included in this report as the Case Study from the Ballarat Network). Because of this, however, a further decision was made by the Area Network Committee not to participate directly in the Victorian evaluation. Subsequently, we, as the Victorian evaluators, were concerned that the views of this region would not be adequately represented in the data and requested that, at least, an Area Network Committee focus group meeting be held to address the questions and issues explored in the other regions. But only a small percentage of the questionnaire data was obtained from this region, and no student focus group meeting was conducted there for the purposes of the Victorian evaluation.

(i) With the permission of school principals, teaching staff and other personnel involved in FSS projects and programs were surveyed by questionnaire (March, 2000), to ascertain:

- criteria for identifying students at risk in their region;
- perceived contributing factors to students dropping out of education and training, and any strategies used to improve the situation and encourage those who had left school to return;
- strategies for locating those students who had already dropped out of school;
- useful resources and support networks; and
- local and regional links that currently exist or are to be developed.

Through this first questionnaire, local project and program personnel were also invited to participate in a regional action research team.

A second questionnaire was administered (October, 2000) to investigate:

- what had been achieved through the projects and programs;
- what proportion of students had stayed, or intended to stay, in education and training, or had found meaningful employment;
- what had happened to those who had dropped out;
- which projects and programs are sustainable, which are not, and why; and
- success stories of specific students within the projects and programs.

Statistics in relation to participation in these questionnaires are provided in Appendix 5 and quantitative data are tabulated in Appendix 6.

(ii) An audiotaped focus group meeting of about one hour's duration was held with each Area Network Committee over a period from May to September. Questions asked (see Appendix 2) related to:

- how their plans were working;
- school-agency links – what makes them work well;
- the tracking of school leavers;
- what schools and teachers might do to encourage students to remain at school;
- the direction of future planning for the projects in the region; and
- the difference that the FSS Program funding was making to participating schools generally.

A focus group with BAYSA personnel, and student welfare coordinators involved in the schools linked with BAYSA, was also conducted, to develop an understanding of what makes school-agency links work.

Audiotapes of these focus groups meetings were transcribed, data analysed and a report returned to each region for comment and elaboration. A report compiling the data and analysis from all the regions (including those from the first questionnaire) was also sent to each Area Network Committee to assist them in future planning.

(iii) An audiotaped focus group meeting of about half an hour's duration was held for student volunteers (with parental permission) from an alternative program in each region, over a period from June to September, 2000. In some regions, two such meetings were held. These meetings were to ascertain how students' involvement with particular programs was assisting them, how students' work or education and training goals were changing as a result of these programs and an overall appraisal of the programs they had experienced. Thus, student focus group questions (see Appendix 3) centred on:

- students' reasons for joining the program;
- students' perceptions of the program, what they liked about it and/or would like to change, and how it differed from other school programs;
- what students were gaining from the program; and
- ideas students now had for the future.

Audiotapes of these focus group meetings were also transcribed, the data analysed, and a written summary of each analysis was returned to the focus group facilitator (and students) for comment.

3. Data collection through action research teams (Cherry, 1999; Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988), established in each region, proceeded from April to October, 2000. Facilitated by regional personnel, and deciding on the most productive way of working to evaluate and explore possibilities for improvement in their region, these teams, variously:
   - collected data on the success of particular projects and programs;
   - clarified assumptions behind their own Area Program and assessed them in the light of the findings of the literature, the first questionnaire and the Area Network Committee focus groups; and
   - formulated action research questions and action plans, based on an appropriate rationale.

   Thus, the task of each team was to evaluate their projects and programs, implement action plans for improvement, if possible, monitor their influence, and engage in structured discussion and reflection within the team concerning the effectiveness of their programs. Data collection was undertaken by, for example, teacher observation, obtaining student feedback, conducting student focus groups, interviewing parents and surveying teachers.

STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

The following report comprises:

- a literature review outlining recent research on potential early leavers, community-based initiatives and partnerships, and success factors in retaining potential early leavers;

- three chapters containing data and their interpretation from the questionnaires and focus groups in relation to:
  (i) potential early leavers (what characterises them, what is likely to keep them in school and what they think of particular alternative programs);
  (ii) community-based approaches (how these can be made to work effectively);
  (iii) the schools (what is being and still needs to be done to effect change that supports the FSS Program initiative);
- a chapter containing eight case studies, one from each of the regions, describing the action research project conducted there; and
- a final chapter, summarising the outcomes of the FSS Program initiative, identifying the major themes emerging from the data, and providing recommendations for the future development of projects and programs for potential early leavers.

2 POTENTIAL EARLY LEAVERS AND COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACHES: A LITERATURE REVIEW

The effects of leaving school before completing Year 12, and outcomes for the young people involved and the community at large, are well documented. Interest in addressing this issue arises from two major imperatives (Withers and Batten, 1995, p. 4):

- economic, that is, to develop a highly skilled workforce and increase national competitiveness; and
- humanistic, that is, to nurture young people to develop maturity as well as skills, with a focus on building good citizenship.

The economic imperative and its associated pressure on education and training systems are driven by three interrelated factors. Information technology increases speed of communication at reduced cost, which enables organisations and nations to focus on production and financial markets on a global scale. Components of production can be linked across the world and this, together with the introduction of new technologies in the workplace, has led to the adoption of work practices such as work teams and frontline management, which have advanced the level of skills required. Some jobs become obsolete, requiring new and different sets of skills and continuous training. Those who are unwilling or unable to develop sought-after skills face employment exclusion. Groups who are particularly vulnerable are youth, long-term unemployed, older displaced workers and people with disabilities (International Labour Office, 1998).

The humanistic imperative is reflected, not surprisingly, in most of the education literature. Much is associated with 'social despair' (Withers and Batten, 1995, pp. 5-6), which relates to drug abuse and other circumstances such as crime, homelessness, poverty and breakdown in family relationships. These constitute a set of risk factors that may contribute to young people leaving school early. As Stokes (2000) argues, however, in her recent report on young people not in the education and training system or employment, many see themselves as being in a temporary situation. With appropriate support, guidance and contacts, they believe they can get back on track.

Both imperatives need to be addressed in the transition from school to adult life. Withers and Batten, however, caution that these imperatives sometimes compete in the literature, raising concerns about leaving many problems to the schools to fix through curricula, while neglecting the diversity and multi-faceted needs of

youth. The Victorian Full Service Schools Program's focus on community networks has the capacity to embrace an holistic approach that attempts to create a web of support that has been taken up in the recommendations of the Ministerial Report of Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria (Kirby, 2000).

In addressing the question of how to re-engage potential early leavers and, indeed, prevent disengagement from occurring in the first place, this review of the national and international literature focuses on the following themes:

- Potential early leavers: why do they disengage from school?
- Success factors in retaining potential early leavers.
- Community-based initiatives and partnerships.

In addition, aspects of a social theory of learning are outlined, to assist in meaningfully drawing together some of the data presented in this report.

POTENTIAL EARLY LEAVERS: WHY DO THEY DISENGAGE FROM SCHOOL?

Early school leaving is of worldwide concern because of its correlation with high rates of youth unemployment. The International Labour Office (1998) reports figures of 60 million young people aged between 15 and 24 (worldwide) who are unable to find work. In Australia, the rate of teenage employment in the 1990s has been in greater decline than in the previous two decades (Sweet, 1998, p. 9). In Victoria, approximately 11,000 young people leave school without any kind of qualification even though they have limited job prospects. Most have attempted Year 11, the first year of the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE), but many opt out at the end of Year 10 or sometimes earlier (Kirby, 2000). In a recent study of early school leavers, Stokes (2000) found that 55% of those interviewed had left school in or before Year 9.

It must be stressed, however, that not all early school leavers are 'at risk'. Dwyer (1996) found that some make positive choices to take up employment or an apprenticeship (and we could now add traineeship). Others may take up a job and may need 'second chance' training at a later stage. A study conducted by McIntyre et al. (cited in NCVER, 1999, p. 2), based on similar categories, found that 28% of early leavers were in the 'positive leaver' group, that is they were engaged in a vocational pathway. A further 20% of students had taken up jobs, but were not necessarily following a chosen career path. Many reported feeling that, having completed Year 11, they had reached a point where they would prefer to continue their education in a vocational pathway that combines learning and work. For boys, this is especially so:

> *Over two-thirds of boys who reach the end of Year 11 go on to further study or training compared to only 53% of girls. These gender differences are due in large measure to the fact that boys have much greater access to structured combinations of work and training* (Kirby, 2000, p.57)

Altogether, Dwyer identified six types of early school leaver and noted that those types who fall into the 'at risk' category do so for different reasons. These are outlined in Table 1. In the McIntyre et al. (1999) study, approximately 38% were regarded as being at risk of not making the transition from school to work.

Table 1: Characteristics of early school leavers (from Dwyer, 1996)

'At Risk' Early Leaver Type	Characteristics
Would-be leavers	Reluctant – would prefer to have a job but don't have one lined up.
Circumstantial leavers	Leave for non-educational reasons e.g. family circumstances
Discouraged leavers	Have had a record of poor academic performance and little success at school
Alienated leavers	Similar to discouraged students but needs are more difficult to meet

What are the risk factors?

In their review of the Australian literature (1980-1994), Batten and Russell (1995) highlight findings of a study of risk factors that affected early leaving in a Queensland high school (Bradley, 1994). The two key factors were 'satisfaction with school' and 'the most recent grade point average' (p. 57). Marks (1999) also argues that low achievement and low levels of satisfaction with school are of 'overriding importance', regardless of any other factor (cited in NCVER, 1999, p. 3). Low levels of satisfaction with school culture and school responses to students' needs were also cited by Stokes (2000, p. 13) as key contributing factors in early school leaving:

> *School failure led to absenteeism and behaviour clashes, which in turn further isolated them* (students) *from access to successful learning. A number of these young people express a strong sense of injustice as to the ways in which they feel schools have treated them.*

In breaking down what satisfaction with school means, Samdal et al. (1998) identified three predictors of satisfaction. These are that: teachers are friends; the environment is safe, especially from bullying and verbal put-downs; and students have a chance to make friends.

These recent findings suggest that, if satisfaction with school is high, it may ameliorate risk factors that have to do with the individual (for example, self-esteem, health status, behaviour); the family (for example, fragmented or reconstituted family structures, family functioning, low income, homelessness); the school (for example, school organisation, policies and practices, discipline; curriculum; school climate); society (for example, poverty); or group differences

(for example, gender, ethnicity, geographic isolation). Batten and Russell (1995), however, caution that relationships between risk factors 'need to be viewed as forming a dense and complex web of interrelated, interacting, multi-directional forces' (p. 50). There is no simple cause-effect relationship between risk factors and educational outcomes. Nevertheless, the authors do acknowledge that indicators or behavioural signs that 'point to the probable outcome of early leaving' may be useful.

These are listed below, and are taken from Batten and Russell (1995, p. 55):

- Stated intention to leave school early.
- Enrolled in default of a job; desire to pursue a practical course/career; lack of interest in obtaining a satisfying well-paid job.
- Homelessness.
- Frequent changes of school.
- Pregnancy and motherhood.
- Lack of interest in schooling; low valuing of school completion.
- Poor academic performance; poor work habits; failure to complete work or do homework.
- Passivity; quiet and withdrawn in class.
- Feels school is not supportive; lack of family support; lack of school support.
- Social isolation.
- Lack of competence in English or own language.
- Truancy (especially if chronic); absenteeism; habitual lateness; school refusal/ phobia.
- Alienation from school; dislike/loathing of teachers and authority figures; anger, resentment and hopelessness about school.
- Disruptive behaviour in class; often in trouble at school; non-participation and non-cooperation; aggression; conflicts with peers; gang behaviour and hanging out with a wild crowd; vandalism and graffiti; frequent suspension; expulsion from other schools.
- Drug and alcohol use/abuse; unsafe sexual practices; self injury.
- Extremely poor self image; low self-esteem.

While the above indicators may point to potential early leaving, it is unhelpful to turn them into labels that stereotype school leavers who may be at risk of not making the transition to work and adult life. Labels and stereotypes load responsibility and fault onto young people and marginalise them outside of 'one size fits all' mainstream schooling. A more constructive approach is to begin with the question: 'What are their unmet needs?' then work out what teachers, schools, parents, service providers and governments can do, collectively, to meet different kinds of needs (Dwyer et al., 1998; Batten and Russell, 1995; Holden, 1993; Hixson and Tinzmann, 1990).

What hinders schools' work with potential early leavers?

In areas or schools where there are high numbers of students with educational or social problems, maintaining a focus on the core business of learning and educational attainment is not easy. The recent report, *Public Education: The Next Generation* (Connors, 2000, pp. 32-34), acknowledges that, for teachers:

... their core tasks of teaching and looking after the welfare of the children in their care are often more complex and they are often called upon to deal with family and social problems beyond their expertise and their responsibility.

Gambone (1993, p. 31) has also noted a number of characteristics that limit a school's capacity to respond to at risk students. These are:

- lack of support for high expectations;
- lack of opportunity;
- lack of resources;
- passive instructional techniques embedded in practitioner experience;
- regimented schedules and timetables; and
- students being too often tracked into low expectation courses.

SUCCESS FACTORS IN RETAINING POTENTIAL EARLY LEAVERS

Following on from the theme of disengagement from school, we now turn our attention to what schools can do to re-engage potential early leavers and reduce the likelihood of the problem occurring in the first place. Schools are complex social settings and workplaces. Therefore the first consideration should be the wellbeing of those who work and study there. A safe, secure and supportive psychosocial environment is an essential condition for learning (Connors, 2000; Marks, 1999; St.Leger and Nutbeam, 1999; Samdal et al., 1998; Withers and Batten, 1995).

Mainstream schooling, however, is sometimes unintentionally, and sometimes intentionally, geared towards those who will comply with certain rules and regulations and 'fit' within certain social and learning structures. Young people who do not comply are marginalised and drop out of the system (Stokes, 2000; Batten and Russell, 1995; Holden and Dwyer, 1992). Batten and Russell (1995, p. 33) report that a study of at risk students in a Queensland high school (Bradley, 1992) revealed that half the teachers believed that increasing retention rates was not desirable, and that interventions to improve retention were not the province of the school (for example, they stressed the importance of removing access to unemployment benefits for school leavers, combining part-time work and study, and encouragement from parents). On the other hand, students in the same study focused on the need for changes that were internal to the school (for example, better teacher/student relationships, encouraging students to feel worthwhile, reducing competitive pressures, and increasing opportunities for student input in running the school).

What is suggested is an alternative orientation to schooling that addresses the needs of all students and takes a more flexible approach to addressing these needs through choice, support, democracy, independence and practical curriculum. Drawing on Bradley's findings, Batten and Russell (1995) suggest that schools can address the issue of increasing retention on three levels:

- support for teachers with a focus on changing attitudes towards cooperation with interventions;
- increasing curriculum options with an emphasis on practical and vocational learning; and
- improving school climate.

These three themes are interrelated and, together, are key determinants of increased retention. The findings of the Connors Report (2000, p. 47) raised the issue of disengagement in learning as a major concern and reiterated the responsibility of 'public schools and the system as a whole to cater for the full range of students, including those who are most dependent upon government for their support needs to be met'. Schools may therefore need to re-examine:

> *the central role of school structures (for example, the ways in which students and teachers are grouped, the existence of a person in the school with whom a student can form a primary relationship, etc.), and the nature and quality of the student-teacher relationship in determining and enhancing students' welfare and wellbeing.* (Connors, 2000, p. 48)

The concept of wellbeing as a resource that is fundamental to quality of life and increased productivity in the workplace and schools, as well as family and community settings, is strongly emerging in the literature on mental health. This does not simply mean an absence of mental disorders. The contemporary view of mental health is much more concerned with the 'broad range of social and structural factors which impact upon gender roles, the quality of human relationships, family life, work and educational opportunities' (VicHealth, 1999, p. 4). Indeed, VicHealth (1999), in their review of the mental health literature, report certain *determinants of mental health*, as shown in Table 2. These form the foundation of VicHealth's current strategy to address mental health issues.

Table 2: Summary of mental health determinants identified in the literature (VicHealth, 1999, p.10)

Social connectedness, including:	**Freedom from discrimination and violence, including:**	**Economic participation including:**
• social and community connectedness	• physical security	• access to work and meaningful engagement
• stable and supportive environments	• opportunity for self-determination and control of one's life	• access to education
• variety of social and physical activities		• access to adequate housing
• access to social networks and supportive relationships		• access to money
• valued social position		

These determinants are almost synonymous with those of early school leaving in relation to young people who are deemed at risk of not making a successful transition from school to work and adult life. It is acknowledged, however, that schools alone do not have the capacity and expertise to address issues associated with these determinants. The broader responsibility lies with public policy makers to develop initiatives that address social and economic inequalities rather than interventions that 'aim to assist oppressed groups to develop skills to cope with the destructive effects of poverty and discrimination' (Secker, 1997).

Yet the school is the primary setting for interventions in social problems that affect young people. In cases where families are dysfunctional, 'the school is our "first line of defence" in protecting our children', and is often, too, the last point of contact which these children have with mainstream society (Human Relations and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1989, p. 278). There is much that schools can do to foster social connectedness, provide environments free from discrimination and violence, and develop collaborative approaches to assist young people find meaningful pathways towards economic participation.

Fostering social connectedness

Relationships with significant others and school climate and organisation, in relation to fostering social connectedness, are discussed in the following sections.

Relationships with significant others

The World Health Organisation (WHO, 1997) argues that an individual's social network, the degree of support received from relationships within it, and change or disruption to the network, are important determinants of mental health or lack of it. Social networks provide opportunities for 'communication', 'mutual obligation' and feeling valued and cared for (VicHealth, 1999, p. 10). Young people who are socially isolated are more likely to experience depression than those who have relationships with others in which they feel free to confide (Glover et al., 1998).

The Centre for Adolescent Health, through its Gatehouse Project, has found that 'social connectedness involves having someone to talk to, someone to trust, someone to depend on and someone who knows you well' (VicHealth, 1999). This person may be someone who is not a teacher, for example, a youth worker or school counsellor. The fact that much of the literature, however, advocates the need to improve teacher-student relationships, indicates that attitudes of teachers and the ways in which they respond and interact with young people in their care can have a significant effect on retaining potential early leavers. Batten and Russell (1995) have found that staff working with at risk students require a set of skills and commitments that includes:

- listening to students and parents;
- explaining and providing understanding to other teachers;
- recognising the importance of personal circumstances and social group membership of students; and
- concern for students' educational welfare.

Of particular importance, according to Batten and Russell, is the way in which teachers interact with students both individually (about problems such as academic difficulties, homelessness and pregnancy) and collectively (for example, showing friendliness and respect to students and relating to them as emerging adults). Stokes (2000, p. 31) found that these same qualities were important to the young people she interviewed in a study of early school leavers. For them it was important to have teachers who would:

- listen when the work was difficult;
- treat them as people and convey understanding, for example, 'not hit them' or 'kick them out of class';
- not 'blame them all the time';
- follow up problems (for example, bullying);
- provide group work so that they could get more help;
- provide practical activities that 'don't leave you in the classroom all day';
- negotiate work around their interests and allow them to work at their own pace; and
- not 'punish them for not being brilliant', for example, make them catch up at lunchtime.

Ward et al. (1998, pp. 56-57), studying programs that made a difference for at risk students found that, 'for most students interviewed for this project, the clincher for their continued involvement was the caring and accessible attitude of the staff and the supportive learning environments they created'. What this means in practice is that teachers need to:

- be positive but demanding of students;
- relate well to students;
- have clear expectations of students;
- make studies relevant to students;
- be committed to trying different ideas; and
- be committed to caring, trust and raising self-esteem.

Many programs identified in this study selected particular staff to work with at risk students on the basis of demonstrated qualities of this kind. Withers and Batten (1995, pp. 76-77), citing Gambone (1993), suggest that staff should be selected on personal qualities rather than prior training. These include commitment, a positive attitude, high motivation, sensitivity, creativity, caring, patience, flexibility and openness. They also note that their search of the literature revealed that these attributes are exactly what programs for at risk youth aim to develop in their participants. To achieve these aims, it is therefore essential to have staff who are positive role-models.

Good relationships with teachers, however, are only one component of improving social connectedness. Young people also need opportunities to develop positive relationships with peers. There is far more emphasis on the importance of teacher-student relationships than peer relationships in the literature on early school leavers. This perhaps indicates that most young people are able to form meaningful relationships with their peers, but find it more difficult to form positive relationships

with teachers. Nevertheless, the quality of peer relationships is an important factor in students' satisfaction with school (St.Leger and Nutbeam, 1999; Samdal et al. 1998; Batten and Russell, 1995). According to Batten and Russell (p.45), students perceive the dimensions of quality peer relationships to be:

- group support and equality;
- peer cooperation and group interaction in learning;
- absence of excessive competition; and
- not being labelled or stigmatised.

School climate and organisation

Fostering social connectedness begins with school policy and organisation. This is the framework that determines the degree of flexibility in school arrangements and curriculum. Flexibility, together with choice, support, democracy, independence and practical orientation, are identified as key values underpinning any program aimed at increasing retention (Withers and Batten, 1995, p. 32). Bradley (1992) argues that these values should be embodied in nine aspects of school policy and practice that have an effect on retention. These are:

• School organisation and administration	e.g. flexible timetable; options for part-time study and return to study; smaller groupings of students; vertical groupings of students.
• Relationships and climate	e.g. an environment that is caring, supportive, friendly, relaxed and informal; opportunities for students and teachers to socialise; counselling, guidance and pastoral assistance; mentoring.
• Discipline and control	e.g. student representation; freedom for students; fewer/different rules; tighter record-keeping.
• Curriculum	e.g. practical, vocational studies; life skills and personal development; sport and recreation; fewer compulsory subjects.
• Teaching and learning processes	e.g. student-centred, independent and individualised work; experiential, activity-based learning; class discussions; tutorial assistance; less homework; excursions and camps.
• Assessment and credentials	e.g. criterion-based assessment; fewer exams; feedback; transfer of credit.
• Staffing	e.g. opportunities for retraining in different, broader or more relevant subjects; relief staff to provide time for planning and evaluation; support for teachers to reduce stress, change

	attitudes to retention and increase expectations.
• External links	e.g. work experience; links with TAFE and universities; parent and community involvement in administration and instruction; more information to parents and the community.
• Environment and resources	e.g. attention to appropriate teaching spaces and resources, buildings and grounds, and sport and recreational facilities and equipment.

Rigid and inflexible school systems are unhelpful and even harmful, for example, in regard to contributing to youth homelessness (Dwyer, 1989). Withers and Batten are critical, however, of 'add-on' interventions aimed at reducing early school leaving. They argue that many initiatives intended to provide opportunities for enrichment and informal interaction with teachers and other adults are 'grafted on' to the beginning or the end of the school day. The 'grafts' therefore remain distinct from the 'real work' of the school. They are also critical of initiatives designed to accommodate sub-groups because they stand out as 'isolated alternatives rather than models of systemic reform' (p.37). This, they regard as 'supplemental' rather than 'fundamental' change that is based on challenging 'not only organisational forms, but the myths, customs, and traditions of schooling that shape the day-to-day experiences of students and staff' (p.36).

Wehlage et al. (1992, pp. 85-91) have identified seven criteria for restructuring schools to better meet the immediate needs of at risk students and, at the same time, put in place structures and processes that reduce the potential for early school leaving. These are: student membership in school; student engagement in authentic work; authentic assessment of student performance; moral commitment to disadvantaged youth; reflection and dialogue about educational issues; empowerment of teachers and principals to respond to educational issues; and strengthening school resources. While schools may vary in their capacity to deal with all of these criteria, their commitment and expertise may need broader support to develop 'better systems for the early identification and response to emerging social problems' (Connors, 2000, p. 47). As Connors (2000) also points out, health and social issues that affect young people are often beyond the expertise of the school. How collaborative efforts and partnerships might work to address these issues are discussed later in this review.

Providing environments free from discrimination and violence

Peer relationships can be destructive. Withers and Batten (1995) found that young people who engage in high-risk activities are particularly sensitive to peer pressure, and that these kinds of activities (for example, drinking alcohol, sexual activity) are also highly admired within these groups. They also reported that those who engage in substance abuse are likely to have a 'greater orientation to peers than

adults; strong bonding to negative peers; and weak bonding to conventional peers' (pp.22-23). Batten and Russell (1995, p. 45) note that violence is a particular concern in schools and that bullying, harassment, abuse, intimidation and threats are 'the most systematic and constant forms of violence in schools'. They note that:

> *The victims of violence often develop low self-esteem, a generalised fear of others, depression, stress, tiredness, lack of concentration, disruptive behaviour, inability to form relationships, illness and truancy.*

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training (1994) claim that the incidence of bullying is reduced when schools 'have a climate of warmth, teachers who show a personal interest and involvement in their students' lives, and a whole school approach which takes bullying seriously' (Batten and Russell, 1995, p. 45).

A Commonwealth report (Smyth et al., 2000) found that sex-based harassment was more often directed at girls, mostly from boys, and sometimes from teachers. The effects of this are diminished self-confidence, self-worth and perceived safety, and under-achievement to avert attention. The report also highlighted racism as a form of violence, ranging from teasing to exclusion and physical violence, that is not adequately addressed by schools and contributes significantly to under-achievement amongst indigenous students. At a time when all young people are pursuing a sense of who they are, 'issues of class, gender, race, masculinity, sexuality, disability and Aboriginality ... (are) often sites of trouble as they (young people) assert(ed) the right to construct an identity for themselves around early school leaving' (Smyth and Hattam, 2000).

Whilst there are many factors that reduce vulnerability and increase resiliency to risk, one important factor is having close peer-group friends (Withers and Batten, 1995, p. 20). The authors add that any interventions intended to address at risk youth should take peer group influences into account and 'use the positive ones in a positive way' (p. 51).

Towards economic participation

The following section deals with issues associated with changes in curriculum, the role of vocational learning in improving school retention rates and the development of competence and capability.

Engaging students in coherent and relevant curriculum

Students who lack interest in courses, subjects and activities are more likely to experience poor academic performance which leads to disengagement with formal learning (Batten and Russell, 1995). Whilst perceived uninteresting curriculum and/or unachievable expectations may be two of a set of factors that are different for each individual young person who leaves school early, they are key determinants for most at risk students that accumulate throughout their schooling. This assertion is reflected in the Kirby Report (2000, p. 78) that found that:

a significant number of young people enter the post compulsory years in Victoria with poor educational preparation and a history of educational failure. Many have effectively stopped formal learning.

Not surprisingly, the Report also found that the problem is amplified for those groups of students who are not competent in English, or whose cultural needs are not met (for example, Koorie students). It is simply easier for discouraged or alienated students to leave school than to continue to battle with 'keeping up with the amount of classroom work' or work that they have found too hard (Stokes, 2000). Students in this category are more likely to leave school before completing Year 11. Kirby, however, also found that many potential early leavers, particularly in country Victoria, have not always experienced academic failure. Their lack of interest in schoolwork and desire to work are the reasons most often cited for wanting to leave school. For some, moving on to another education and training setting, such as TAFE, is perceived as more relevant to their interests and aspirations (Centre for Post Compulsory Education and Training (CPCET) Survey, work in progress), cited in Kirby (2000, pp.50-52). This suggests, as Kirby points out, that for many students the link between 'general education' curriculum and work (their motive for staying at school) is weak.

The role of vocational learning

The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) defines *vocational learning* as a 'component of general education' that offers students in Years 9 and 10, particularly potential early leavers, work-related learning experiences that articulate into *vocational education and training (VET)* courses at Years 11 and 12 (NCVER, 2000). At a policy level, this represents a shift towards a broader view of learning and legitimate settings for secondary school students that exist beyond classrooms.

Many potential early leavers opt for or are referred to these programs because of their practical orientation and perceived relevance in terms of access to the labour market (Lamb et al., 2000). They reflect attempts to provide relevant and practical curriculum but, as discussed earlier in this report, this represents only one dimension of the myriad of young people's needs that contribute to early school leaving. VET programs are not a panacea. This view is maintained by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (1996) who claims that students at risk are more likely to benefit from specialised courses tailored to meet their needs.

Effective VET programs: require strong support from employers; connect curriculum, assessment and certification with occupations in the labour market; integrate general and vocational programs; and provide flexibility for students to move between programs (OECD, 1996, cited in NCVER, 2000). While many schools have achieved success in these areas, VET programs are continually threatened by 'restrictions in costs, organisational complications and a lingering academic bias in schools' (Kirby, 2000). As a consequence, vocational education is marginalised in many schools (Ryan, 1997), putting additional pressures on

students who wish to pursue this pathway in terms of additional costs and timetable restrictions.

These kinds of barriers to learning options that have potential to meet the needs of a significant proportion of young people present a challenge to policy makers and schools. VET requires additional resources for workplace placement, supervision and assessment, and training courses purchased from VET providers. NCVER (2000) research indicates that separate resources need to be made available for 'new initiatives' such as VET programs. Otherwise, limited resources are spread too thinly to meet competing demands, affecting other courses and groups of students. Lamb et al. (2000) argue that 'there is a need for (VET) programs to be treated as having the same value as traditional academic courses' (p. 3) to provide relevance and inclusiveness. This requires a mind shift in policy and practice from what is described by NCVER (2000) as a 'one size fits all' approach to education, to one that embraces flexibility, choices, coordination and planning in teaching, training and work-based learning to meet individual needs of students.

All young people also need the opportunity to develop their own social resources, their 'social capital' (Fryer, 2000), through experiencing constructive and caring relationships with teachers and other adults (demonstrating a school's social capital), if they are to improve their life chances and social mobility and contribute to the common good. To succeed, they need to readily identify themselves as 'learners' and their activities as 'learning', and develop confidence in managing their learning. This, according to Fryer, gives them a platform for further learning, experimentation and working effectively with others. For a growing number of young people, vocational learning offers this platform with real hope of achieving a qualification, meaningful work and a sense of 'I can'. According to a New South Wales study (Onyx and Bullen, 1997) building 'social capital' is dependent upon: participation in the local community, proactivity in a social context, feelings of trust and safety, neighbourhood connections, tolerance of diversity, and valuing of life and work connections.

Winter (2000, pp. 34–35), also in a discussion of social capital, explains that people get involved in social activity because it offers them recognition and a sense of self-worth. This then is the 'inner spring' or 'engine for action' – their motivation. He cites Latham (1997, p. 17) who maintains that this theory explains why, for example, young people may engage in negative behaviour, that is, 'without the capacity to excel by conventional means (they) seek recognition through various forms of negative behaviour'. In addition, this explains why teachers and other personnel become involved in community-based collaborative ventures.

Developing competence and capability

There is evidence that low levels of early school achievement are associated with marginalisation in the labour market. Sweet (1996), cited in Ainley (1998), found in a study of 18 and 19 year olds over a two year period in 1993 and 1994, that 40% of those who were at the lower end of the achievement scale spent at least nine months in neither full-time study nor full-time work. Similarly, those young

people whose parents are unskilled or semi-skilled are likely to experience long periods of marginal part-time employment or unemployment at twice the rate of young people whose parents are engaged in professional or managerial work. He also notes that marginal employment is also characterised by a high rate of movement from one job to another.

What can be done to increase employability? In responding to Ainley and others in *Australia's Youth: Reality and Risk* (1998, pp. 169-172), the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) and the Business Council of Australia put forward the following suggestions and recommendations:

- Schools should be encouraged to offer a diversity of opportunities for students, which relate to the local labour market.
- Skills gained through part-time/casual work should be promoted in schools and formally recognised in line with the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) for example, McDonald's Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) traineeship.
- Learning and work experience need to be better integrated and students need to experience learning opportunities relevant to work and 'within a context of educating the "whole person"'.
- VET programs (including general VET and pre-VET programs at Year 10) should be accessible to all students and these programs need better support from non-VET teachers in schools.
- VET in Schools programs need to be targeted so that they reflect 'real job opportunities and skills shortages, particularly of local industry'.
- Areas with large populations of at risk students need to be 'identified and targeted for VET programs'.
- Part-time/casual jobs need to be supplemented 'with training opportunities such as part-time traineeships or "stand alone" VET courses'.
- Industry and schools need to work together at the local level to focus on students' work readiness, for example, map employment opportunities, identify particular employability skills and competencies that are required locally, and provide work placements.
- Incentives and subsidies should be offered to employers to off-set training and supervision costs and encourage them to provide more job opportunities.

COMMUNITY-BASED INITIATIVES AND PARTNERSHIPS

Below, issues associated with developing and maintaining partnerships for the benefit of potential early leavers are discussed, together with a very brief outline of conditions for effective case management, advocacy and tracking of exit students.

The concept of partnership

Because the issues associated with early school leaving are diverse and often draw in other people, that is, family and peers in a young person's particular circumstances, approaches to help them tend to be fragmented and provider-specific. NCVER (2000) highlights an example from research on the Central Coast of New South Wales (McIntyre et al., 1999) that shows how difficult it can be to coordinate and map providers of services for young people at risk:

> *The providers fell into two main groups: government and private/community. In the government group schools provided careers/work education which varied from school to school, and TAFE Institutes offered 'get skilled' courses, certificate courses for Year 9 and 10 equivalence, apprenticeship training and traineeships. ... typical private provider services included: a pathways program to support early school leavers who are at risk; job preparation activities and career advice; group training ...* (companies that employed) *apprentices and trainees and leased them to host employers; a federally funded agency* (that sought) *employment and training opportunities for homeless and 'at risk' young people and* (acted) *as a referral point and provided counselling; and a help early leavers program* (that offered) *non-accredited certificate* (courses) *for 14-24 year-olds* (to) *encourage participants to return to school. A company auspiced by the Department of Community Services offered advocacy services – running youth workshops, camps and excursions, personal development programs, guest speakers, and parent, carer and peer support for 12-25 year-olds, and provided 'drop-in' and youth centres* (pp. 5-6).

All the providers in this community shared views about meeting the needs of early school leavers. However, they worked independently and knew little about what other agencies and services offered, and local TAFE responses suggested that early school leavers would be better accommodated in settings other than TAFE.

In contrast, the NCVER Report cites the coordinated approach developed in Sweden as one that promotes collective responsibility for meeting the needs of young people up to the age of 18, including early school leavers. Those who are not engaged in full-time education or work are assisted with personal plans that include counselling, education and work. These plans and the transition the young people are making into further education or permanent work are reviewed every

ten weeks to prevent them from 'falling through cracks'. Similar successful programs are offered in Denmark, Norway and Ireland, based around municipalities.

The focus on regional responsibility rather than on the school alone is likely to have the effect of coordinating resources and providing multi-access points for young people who have left school. Stokes (2000) found that few young people made contact with the student welfare coordinators in their schools before they finally left. Sometimes exiting students were referred to an agency for continuing education and training, but more young people made contact with Centrelink in order to comply with requirements of the Youth Allowance. Looking after the needs of the whole person, however, is not within the brief of Centrelink.

Gardner (1990), cited in Withers and Batten (1995), maintains that the weakness in policy implementation is that it is often too pragmatic and fragmented focusing on a particular problem without examining underlying causes and how they interrelate. He advocates systems that are based on the following principles:

- schools and agencies are linked 'horizontally' and do not operate separately;
- funding is pooled to avoid 'turf protection';
- young people are case managed by one agency or a cross-agency manager;
- employers are actively involved; and
- annual indicators of youth outcomes provide public accountability.

At the local level, Gardner stresses that an effective community planning process: is generated locally; has strong leadership; has broad multi-racial and parent involvement; and focuses on accountability. He also emphasises how important it is to avoid coordination translating into bureaucratic exercises and structures without tackling the 'hard tasks of working with parents and line workers to develop and link programs that really help youth' (p. 10). To avoid this situation, he defines collaboration in terms of 'three escalating steps'. These involve:

- *hooks* – providing links between programs for a particular young person;
- *glue* – funding that is conditional on 'making sure kids get help under one roof, but from several services' (p. 11); and
- *joint ventures* – agencies collaborating to seek funds for jointly operated programs.

Gardner warns, however, that the credibility of this community planning process will be undermined 'if spurred on only by outside money and influences'. If this is the case, local agencies will be focused on the money rather than helping youth. He adds other warnings:

> *If local leaders are ineffective or don't understand program fragmentation to be a problem, they won't do anything about it. If the planning process is 'top to bottom' with no involvement by parents, teachers and youth themselves, then the community will not 'buy in' – and the proposed plan won't reflect the community's true needs* (p. 11).

Several factors are cited in the literature as having an influence on the degree of voluntary involvement in the community. One is said to be the trust developed through people knowing each other, a second, a common commitment to the needs of the community (Hughes et al., 1999), with a third being the social cohesion that develops when communities are monocultural and well-established (Cox, 1998). In cities, however, people from voluntary organisations tend to be drawn from a wide area and will not necessarily know one another. It is also easier for people in urban areas to withdraw their involvement without it having an effect on other aspects of their lives (Felmeth, 1996), cited in Hughes et al. (1996, p. 21). Thus, it appears that conditions favourable to voluntary involvement are more likely to pertain in rural rather than in urban areas (Onyx and Bullen, 1997) and therefore collaboration over the issue of students at risk may be strongest outside urban areas.

Case management, advocacy and tracking exit students

It is not the intention of this review to examine the principles of effective case management, advocacy and tracking students. This is a study in itself. Nevertheless, the literature surrounding 'youth at risk' identifies this element as a key component of any initiative to reduce early school leaving or to prevent those who do leave early from 'falling through the cracks'. For the purposes of this report, however, only a brief look at the role case management, advocacy and tracking might play in a local community-based program is attempted.

Kingsley (1993), cited in Withers and Batten (1995, pp. 90-91), provides the following insights into *case management:*

- Case management is a long-term, one-to-one intervention that aims to assist young people to clarify and prioritise their goals, build their 'capacities to exercise self-determination and autonomy' and develop personal action plans.
- The case manager also provides access to resources, monitors service completion and works with the young person to gradually reduce dependency on having a case manager.
- A systems approach to case management is one that works between and across agencies, is community wide and provides 'multi-institutional sites for learning' as an effective strategy for coordinating services.

As part of the case management function, there is also an *advocacy* role to assist young people who have left school to navigate the complexities of 'bureaucratic procedures, jargon and behaviour which sometimes typify social service agencies' (Withers and Batten, p. 76). Stokes (2000) found this was particularly so with the introduction of the Youth Allowance. It presented a barrier to re-entry into education and training for many young people who needed assistance to negotiate their way back into the system.

Kingsley identifies a range of different models for inter-agency case management. These are: a partnership of existing agencies; provision of services by a central coordinating agency; a specialist team or individual; and a coordinating council

that organises and monitors services. Marcus and Swisher (1992), cited in Withers and Batten (1995), describe a successful case management component of a program for potential early school leavers that was conducted in Arkansas. The key features of this case management approach included: monthly contact with individuals; exit interviews; interviews with the family and counsellor; and data collection on grades, attendance and graduation. The program itself included academic classes, job skills and paid employment for sixty days that was run as a residential program over the summer holidays. Withers and Batten acknowledge that the tradition of summer camps is much stronger in North America than in Australia. Yet they argue that this may be particularly useful for at risk students. This seems logical in theory as the vital contact with case management personnel and meaningful activities may be lost over the summer holiday break. The difficulty of funding such programs, however, is not addressed.

With respect to *tracking* at risk young people, Gambone (1993, p. 24), cited in Withers and Batten (1995), advocates: daily contact and conversation; keeping running records; case conferences; keeping attendance rolls; the use of rating scales of competence; and negotiated contract reviews. The Kirby Report (2000, p. 21), in particular, recommends that the role of tracking be developed through local planning networks with 'technical support provided by the office of DEET and agreements with the networks and the providers within them'. This service should be provided for each individual 'until a successful outcome is recorded'.

ASPECTS OF A SOCIAL THEORY OF LEARNING

Learning in communities of practice

From the perspective of a social theory of learning, Lave and Wenger (1991) describe learning as a situated activity, characterised by a social process of participation in what they term 'communities of practice' through which learning and understanding are configured. A community of practice is described by Wenger (1998, p. 73) as one characterised by mutual engagement over time (though not necessarily face-to-face), a joint enterprise or endeavour, and a shared repertoire, developed as people work together to resolve the 'ownable' or felt dilemmas that confront them (Lave 1990, p. 317). The quality of the relationships between all the people involved in this community is thus highlighted. Examples of such communities of practice, described as learning communities when they form a site for creating knowledge, as well as acquiring it from elsewhere (Wenger, 1998, p. 220), might be a group of students working in an alternative program, a committee that meets regularly and a group within a workplace that engages in shared activities. Families might also be described as communities of practice. Indeed, communities of practice are everywhere and learning is said to be fundamentally situated within them.

This perspective has a number of implications for exploring school learning, learning in alternative programs and cultural change in schools. Lave (1990) describes how school students, unable to see the relevance of the tasks set in school or understand what is required of them, may develop 'interstitial communities of practice' that generate practices of resistance to learning rather than engaging with the curriculum as devised. Or, students who are fearful of being wrong may stay with tried and true 'formulae' for getting the right answer, rather than risking new methods that may lead to their appearing foolish and incompetent. Indeed, she draws attention to the 'learning curriculum' in contrast to the 'teaching curriculum' (Lave and Wenger, 1991, pp. 97-8), the former being the whole field of learning resources available to students, including other people, and from the perspective of the learners themselves (p. 64). This includes the 'hidden curriculum', from which students may learn that they are not valued or respected by the way in which the teacher speaks to them, or fails to listen.

In relation to cultural and structural change in schools, this perspective would predict that productive teacher participation in delivering or supporting alternative programs is a key to change. Once teachers become involved, the dilemmas posed by accommodating students at risk within existing frameworks are likely to precipitate changes in their practices (or a desire to become more skilled), and a call for modifying school structures to resolve the difficulties of, for example, timetabling work placements without students missing classes. Engaging and conversing positively with students who have participated in alternative programs (or their advocates) may well enable teachers to develop new meanings both about the programs and the students themselves.

From this perspective, an inevitable consequence of learning, for good or ill, by both teachers and students, is identity change. Wenger (1998, p. 5) describes identity as 'a way of talking about how learning changes who we are' creating 'personal histories of becoming in the context of communities'. Thus students who are seen as marginalised within a school may acquire negative identities as 'the dumb ones' or the 'trouble-makers'. On the other hand, given interested teachers and opportunities to engage in activities that demonstrate and develop competence, positive identities as 'good students' or 'competent team members', for example, begin to emerge. Similarly, participating mainstream teachers may begin to identify with the requirements of at risk students and see themselves as capable of working with them effectively.

Very important are the types of identities on offer to students through the learning activities provided – whether they are sufficiently attractive to students to encourage them to learn, or whether competing identities, as the class clown, for example, are more attractive. One of the advantages of vocational programs, as seen through this perspective, is that they offer the chance of membership in a job-related community of practice that provides the opportunity for acquiring an immediately valued identity. As a contrast, academic work might offer to some young people

merely the identity of 'mediocre or poor student', or even 'failure', unless specifically related to important possibilities for the future and providing some measure of success.

Brokering the boundaries of communities of practice

Each school provides the location for many communities of practice. It appears, however, that these can never be adequate alone to provide the kind of learning that many students require. Thus other communities of practice, in community agencies, TAFE Institutes and industrial workplaces are essential to provide a 'full service' for many students. Yet negotiating across the boundaries of these communities of practice may be quite difficult. Personnel whose business it is, either formally or informally, to make this process easier are described by Wenger (1998, p. 105) as 'brokers', who assist in negotiating meanings across the divide and introduce elements of the practice of each community into others. Over time, this brokering may well become a 'boundary practice' (p. 115). Indeed teaching itself may be thought of in this way, inasmuch as it involves linking students with many new aspects of the world outside the classroom.

Teachers and youth workers, for example, belong to different communities of practice and, unless 'translation work' is done for them by a broker, misunderstandings may often arise. Each needs to understand the other's practices and accommodate them. When groups are established to coordinate activities over many communities of practice, they often form a community of practice (and perhaps a learning community) of their own and engage in a form of 'collective brokering' (Wenger, 1998, p. 114) that sometimes develops new boundary practices. Indeed, in the FSS Program, Area Network Committees established in each region to create connections between schools and the community would seem to be a good example of this enterprise. One of the dangers of becoming communities of practice in their own right, however, is that such communities may gain 'so much momentum of their own that they become insulated from the practices they are supposed to connect' (p. 115). For example, agencies may become preoccupied with ways of obtaining funding, as mentioned by Gardner (1990), and committees with maintaining or developing their power and control.

3 POTENTIAL EARLY LEAVERS: DIVERSE NEEDS AND CAPACITIES

In this chapter, first, ways of identifying potential early leavers, and their reasons for leaving, are explored. This is followed by an account of the 'teaching curriculum' of alternative programs (Lave and Wenger, 1991, pp. 97-98) and their perceived outcomes from the schools' perspective, as contrasted with an account of the 'learning curriculum' in a number of specific alternative programs, from the students' perspective. Finally, what students say about their likely futures after undertaking these programs, is also reported.

IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL EARLY LEAVERS

Thirty five percent of respondents to the first questionnaire administered in the evaluation suggested that between 20-30% of students at their school were at risk of dropping out. Another 35% estimated that 10-20% were at risk, while a further 16% estimated that less than 10% were at risk. Echoing the findings of Batten and Russell (1995), the major 'at risk' indicators employed by respondents were absenteeism, low motivation, low career aspirations or lack of purpose, and a history of academic failure. Other indicators included school behaviour problems, low skill levels (for example, literacy problems), boredom or lack of engagement with school, family breakdown and/or independent living, personal and financial problems, low self-esteem and lack of confidence, and poor social skills. Certain specific conditions were also identified as 'at risk' indicators, including drug abuse, depression, self-harm, and promiscuity/sexual abuse.

Forty-nine percent of respondents to the second questionnaire (see Appendix 6 for a summary of quantitative data) reported that systems for identifying potential early school leavers were 'developing well' and another 23% reported 'early stages of development'. A further 20% reported that these procedures had been 'significantly achieved'. FSS Program coordinators were generally less confident of achievement in this area than Principals/Senior administrators and other coordinators[4]. It was

[4] This is a pattern repeated throughout the data, suggesting perhaps that those people most closely involved in an enterprise are best placed to assess its outcomes and difficulties. Since quite a high proportion of respondents to the questionnaires (approximately 30% – see Appendix 5 for Questionnaire Participation Statistics) were principals and senior administrators, this may have skewed the data somewhat in a positive direction throughout.

said that students at risk are identified largely through the various coordination functions within schools, for example, year levels, student welfare, home groups/ pastoral groups, sub-school teams and house leaders. It is clear that student welfare coordinators (SWCs) play a vital role. Students may be referred by classroom or pastoral teachers or identified as not passing particular year levels. In some cases, this referral was reported as 'instinctive' or 'anecdotal'. One respondent felt that better indicators needed to be developed.

Many schools have developed indicators. These include attendance, behaviour, academic records and reports and, in one case, students' home situations. One school is developing 'a screening test to be used in conjunction with other measures (for example, teacher reports, demographic data)'. Some schools survey staff or review students' progress on a regular basis. Many respondents who indicated that procedures had been 'significantly achieved' or were 'developing well', reported that additional student support systems had been put in place. These included involvement of youth workers, project officers and Jobs Pathway Programme/Job Placement Employment and Training (JPP/JPET) staff, using youth support sessions, case management, student support planning meetings, checklists and mentoring programs ('to identify these students at a very early stage'). In one region, risk identification was passed on to the senior secondary college from feeder schools.

Many schools that reported 'significant achievement' in identifying students at risk linked identification with comprehensive strategies for addressing students' needs and monitoring students' progress. For example, they reported the following: 'Parent meetings; youth workers in schools; use of parent support frameworks'; 'Through the mentoring process – this has been a process to enable staff to identify these students at a very early stage'; 'Currently identified 32 students for the Pathways Project'[5] and negotiated pathways plans for most of them'; 'Pastoral teachers/SWC/youth worker meet on a weekly basis to discuss student progress; close liaison between year level coordinators and JPP/JPET staff'; and 'Student at risk identification from feeder colleges extensively developed. Mentor program established with at risk students extended school wide in 2001'. More extensive comments included:

> *Welfare staff work with level coordinator to identify (*students at risk*) through indicators. Strategy developed and tracked through case management. Information passed on by each level coordinator of each year.*
>
> *Students are identified through junior school coordinators. Criteria (*include*) academic performance, attendance, behaviour, home situation. Students*

[5] The Pathways Project is an initiative being implemented in 12 areas in Victoria. It was introduced in the year 2000 and is funded by the Victorian Government. Amongst other things, it assists students (15-19 year olds) to negotiate Pathways Plans that can engage them more positively in education, training, employment, or a combination of these (Kirby, 2000, p.131).

are followed up by senior school staff, offered other options as well as mainstream VCE.

*We will be further changing the school exit form to get more data, and change exit procedures to have ESLs (*early school leavers*) (who don't formally exit the school) to be referred to a Pathways Negotiator under the Pathways Project.*

We have a system of student updates that are completed by staff to identify any areas of concerns and where needed these updates are followed up by student support planning meetings.

The student welfare coordinators; the youth support sessions (referral forms/ assessments); established workshops for students; the MARS *(Motivation and Retention of Students)* program – case management; and data recording systems.

WHY DO THEY LEAVE?

Consistent with the above, the major reasons for students dropping out of school identified by respondents to the first questionnaire, were:

- family issues (lack of support or family breakdown);
- inappropriate school programs; and
- a lack of purpose or disengagement from school.

Illustrating the 'complex web' formed by the many 'at risk' factors mentioned by Batten and Russell (1995), a focus group of student welfare coordinators (SWCs) particularly stressed the influence of lack of family support, or worse, on school failure, and thus on early leaving. A definite need for early intervention was highlighted. They noted that, often, those students who had attended an early intervention program in Years 7-8 could then cope with the rest of their schooling without help, but a new group of students requiring assistance appeared to arise from Year 9 onwards. Elaborating this point further, one student, when asked if coping with school work was an issue, explained:

It can be. If home life gets too much to handle, you don't feel like getting up in the morning and going to school. You get up in the morning and you go over to your friend's house and you can sit there and, like, smoke dope or get drunk or whatever.

Another added, 'Or you just stay in bed'. The first student continued:

And that's when it starts affecting your school work. And if there's nothing there to stop that from happening in the first place, well then you have nothing better to do than drink.

A youth worker explained:

Normally school's the most stable thing for them and if we can keep that as stable as possible for the young person, then that's great that they can come

to school and go 'OK, I feel safe, I'm comfortable, I've got six periods of the day where I can relax and be fine' and then ... give them different ways of working through their home issues.

It was also stressed that many of the young people who require assistance with family issues are quite talented. Yet illustrating the different perspectives of teachers, students and their families over the issue of achievement, and highlighting the need for teachers to understand their students better, one SWC told the story of a student with whom teachers were quite impatient. The student was often absent from school but eventually passed Year 11. Her family, however, thought that she had succeeded brilliantly since she was the first member of the family to proceed this far in school. She had no idea that her teachers were so frustrated with her – nor did her family.

SCHOOL PERSPECTIVES ON ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS

Below, new curriculum options developed or built upon through the FSS Program, together with conditions for fostering employability skills, are described by respondents to the two questionnaires. These are followed by some of the success stories for the FSS Program.

New curriculum options

Virtually all respondents to the second questionnaire reported development of a broader range of curriculum options, offered at Years 8-12, as the major focus for retaining potential early leavers through the FSS Program initiative. Requested to indicate whether they were engaged in a new program or one that extended an existing program, 65% identified the former, indicating that, while FSS Program funding had enabled many new programs and projects to be developed, in some cases, existing programs had been the basis upon which the FSS Program initiative had been built.

Seventy-four percent of respondents to this questionnaire reported that programs were either 'developing well' (46.4%) or that outcomes had been 'significantly achieved' (27.5%). Most programs (see Appendix 9 for a 'glossary' of acronyms) included one or more of the following elements:

- VET/TAFE courses in, for example, retail, hospitality, office administration, building and construction, furniture making and horticulture.
- Work preparation through, for example, Job Club, work placements, the Pathways Project, industry visits, Certificate of Work Education, JPP, and part-time school-based New Apprenticeships.
- Enterprise education.
- Personal development and life skills through, for example, CREATE in Geelong, advocacy programs, adventure camps and activities, supportive

friends programs, Scripture Union, action planning, Preparation for Education and Life (PEAL) and anger management.

- Personal interests and skills acquisition through, for example, Bronze Medallion, First Aid Training, driver education, a bike program, a life guard course, and a music course.
- Literacy and numeracy development through, for example, modified VCE courses and Foundation English and Maths.
- Study management and homework clubs, for example, the Senior Students Support Group in Geelong.
- Career planning and advice focusing on a broader range of pathways.
- Mentoring, peer skilling.

In meeting the needs of potential early leavers, the dominant intention reported by respondents to both questionnaires was to 're-engage' or 'connect' these students with school, through motivating learning experiences and relevant curriculum options. Along with developing skills, the programs were designed to increase self-esteem and confidence, improve attitudes to learning, provide a sense of belonging, ensure relevance and provide wider student options, work placement opportunities, individual support programs, clearer pathways and access to 'out of school' personnel. Thus, schools appear to be attempting to promote student wellbeing through increased social connectedness and extended opportunities for eventual economic participation within the society (VicHealth, 1999).

Approximately 36% of the respondents to the first questionnaire indicated that their program was designed to attract early leavers back into education and training. Key elements in making the program attractive to this group were seen to be a modified and flexible curriculum, work experience opportunities, individual support, skill development, links with TAFE and a focus on employment. The most common response to the question about locating early leavers was that the 'young people found the school when they were ready'. Other methods with multiple mentions included 'referred on by community agencies' and 'referred from other schools'. Advertisement and 'word of mouth' were also listed. Since the tracking of early leavers currently appears somewhat ad hoc (see pp. 94–99), any improvements in tracking, as recommended by the Kirby Report (2000, p. 21), is likely to promote the more active recruitment of these early leavers.

Responses to the second questionnaire indicated that all regions believed that they had made good progress towards achievement of their intended outcomes. This is demonstrated by the fact that all respondents saw some progress towards their goals, with the overwhelming majority (93%) recording either moderate or significant achievement. Asked to indicate the extent to which their FSS Area Program had achieved its intended outcome for students against a number of identified outcomes, respondents to the second questionnaire rated 'improved social/life skills' (89%), 'increased self-esteem' (88%), 'a more positive attitude to learning' (87%), 'seeking further education and training' (76%), 'increased attendance rate' (76%) and 'increased retention rate' (74%) as either moderately or significantly achieved.

The response was less enthusiastic for outcomes such as 'improved numeracy skills' (42%), 'improved literacy skills' (62%) and 'seeking employment' (62%). The low achievement rating of literacy and numeracy skills reflects the view of a number of respondents (17% and 20% respectively) that their program was not specifically focused on improving these particular skills. It also emerged that provincial respondents tended to be more confident of the extent of their achievements with these skills than either the metropolitan or rural respondents. In addition, school principals or senior administrators were clearly more optimistic about their program's achievements in these two skills than the FSS Coordinators, a trend also noted earlier (see Footnote 4, p. 45).

Conditions for fostering employability skills

Respondents to the second questionnaire reported a large range of employability skills and attributes that students had gained as a result of their involvement in FSS programs. They fell into four categories: personal development, general work skills and knowledge, specific work skills and knowledge, and skills for staying on at school. Some were reported more commonly than others, but there is a strong sense that students gained sets of comprehensive skills and attributes that contribute to employability. These are listed in Appendix 7.

Respondents to the second questionnaire identified three interrelated components of programs that they believe develop potential early leavers' employability skills. These are:

- personal support and development;
- curriculum that is designed around the following – student needs, capacities and interests; work skills and issues; practical activities; and small groups – and is partly delivered outside the school; and
- regular, relevant work placements/work experience.

The principle that students should experience success and connectedness underpins all three components. Collectively, respondents explained how this could be achieved, with examples from the data being provided below.

Personal support and development

Early identification of students who may be at risk was said to be very important. The fact that 'someone took an interest in them' is likely to make a huge difference to their motivation to stay on at school. Supporting the recommendations of the Connors Report (see p. 30), many respondents to the second questionnaire indicated that an ongoing one-on-one connection with a significant adult helped to develop trust. For some schools this has been formalised through mentoring programs. Others have implemented case management programs, often employing skilled youth development staff or referring students to external youth development programs. In some cases teachers were allocated time release to perform this role. Two respondents from different regions explained that an important part of the role was being an advocate for students 'to get the ball rolling'. Another suggested that not only did students need people to help them stay on at school longer, they also needed people to provide ongoing support should they leave.

Demonstrating many aspects of policy and practice recommended by Bradley (1992), it was said that personal support and development also extended to the classroom, workplace and other external settings. In the *classroom*, students were supported through being in small groups and working with fewer teachers to promote effective student/teacher relationships in an atmosphere of acceptance and respect. In some cases they remained with the same small group to practise and build interpersonal skills and teamwork. There were also reports of programs that involved students from different schools working together in this way. With respect to support in the *workplace*, two respondents advocated the importance of selecting employers carefully and working with them to develop students' employability skills in 'Workplaces where (the) employer knows that he/she is helping this kid and is happy to contribute to the training'. 'Continuous work placement and mentoring by employers or work mates' and 'Follow-up counselling and discussion at school (during) work placement' were recommended. *External* youth development programs and agencies also often provided personal specialist support that schools were unable to give.

Inclusive and differentiated curriculum

Respondents reported two dimensions of curriculum that enable students to develop employability skills: tailored programs for small groups of students, and individualised programs, where students are referred to external programs or agencies as part of a comprehensive learning and development package according to their particular needs at a particular time, for example, behaviour management, anger management and literacy and numeracy 'catch-up'.

Respondents reported that planning curriculum for groups of at risk students began with interviews and counselling to identify their needs and interests. One person stressed the importance of 'putting students, not subjects/content at the centre of the process'. Many programs included components that were delivered outside the school. Students had benefited from being away from the 'everyday school environment'. They experienced a range of learning settings in, for example, TAFE, group training companies, the Jobs Pathway Programme and youth development agencies. This enabled them to experience new ways of learning. Adventure camps and activities, for example, the Wilderness Program in the Casey/Dandenong region and in the BAYSA program in Greater Geelong, were reported as effective 'informal' settings for students to develop personal skills and take 'time out of traditional curriculum and classes to develop at their own pace and at their own level'. Visits and excursions to local agencies and workplaces broadened their horizons about services and opportunities that were available to them and gave them access to key people.

School-based programs that worked were usually based around practical, 'real', hands-on activities in small groups. Many programs focused on specific industry-based skills, for example, welding, food preparation, woodwork, and office administration, into which students self-selected. Others focused on major 'ongoing projects' that were team based and challenging, for example, enterprise programs,

where students were involved in the design, production and marketing of products as part of a small business exercise, or school projects, for example, landscaping. This type of activity enabled students to see a 'result for the effort' and to 'experiment and try things'. One respondent suggested that decision-making skills could be enhanced by:

> *... working backwards from hands-on skills (to enable students and teachers to) problem-solve – why/why it didn't work; how can we make this work; what needs to be done first?*

Work skills/work education programs were often included. These helped students adapt to the workplace and provided greater employment satisfaction. Respondents also advocated individual and small group presentations and class discussions to develop communication skills. One respondent added that it was useful 'to include some highly motivated students in discussion groups (as) positive role models'.

Other suggestions for increasing relevance and interest were: motivational speakers, guest presenters and facilitators who can relate to at risk students; telephone skills and practice, role plays of mock interviews (video-taped for student feedback); tailoring assessment tasks to individual interests; self-concept courses; one-off special theme days; 'using technology for class activities' and providing greater access to computers; suitable elective offerings for students for part of the year; and access to careers/study skills sessions. Two respondents from different regions emphasised the need to create 'challenging' activities for students. One identified challenging and interest-based activities, for example, mechatronics, as especially important for Year 10 boys. With respect to improving literacy and numeracy, two respondents advocated building in 'supervised time at school where students can plan and control their own study activity' and access help with homework and revision. Another included school extension programs and after school support.

Respondents also identified the need to minimise numbers of teachers working with small groups of students to promote teacher/student relationships based on trust (see also p. 63). One person stressed the importance of having a 'key figure teacher for each group of students'. Another identified clear expectations of students as crucial. However, one respondent highlighted how important it is to have *innovative* teachers working in comprehensive ways to develop employability skills:

> *A devoted teacher who teaches students in an integrated setting for the following: English, Maths, Health, Social Education. Innovative teachers for Science, PE and Information Technology.*

Work placements and work experience

Eighty-two percent of respondents to the second questionnaire indicated that their programs involved *work placements*. Of these, more than half responded that the work placements were structured, as opposed to merely providing students with experience in a work environment. In many cases, they reported that both types of work placement were used. Overall, it would appear that work placements are

very common in metropolitan programs, reasonably common in provincial settings and less common in rural areas. FSS coordinators reported higher incidences of work placements than principals/senior administrators and other coordinators.

Many programs include one day of work placement per week for periods of between one term to a whole year. In some programs, students experience different work placements each term. Mostly, these placements are associated with on-the-job training and assessment for TAFE modules and certificates. Some students were undertaking work placements to fulfil requirements for VCE Industry and Enterprise. Only one respondent reported that a student was engaged in a New Apprenticeship.

Work experience, on the other hand, tended to be more focused on exposure to work. For example, in one school, 'Year 9 students had two one-week placements in workplaces as early 'taster' experience'. In another school, students were encouraged to undertake two two-week blocks of work experience in an industry that interested them. Some work experience programs also included industry visits and tours. Respondents reported that work experience programs were conducted over blocks of time, for example, one or two weeks, and also one day per week. In some cases students were able to choose their employer. In other cases, they had to find their own work experience. In one school, students' part-time work was recognised as work experience.

Many respondents reported that students had developed a more positive attitude to work and a work ethic, with work placements and work experience being two of the key influencing elements. They were said to expose students to 'real life' working situations so that they can gain an appreciation of the expectations and responsibilities of work. Exposure to different workplaces was also said to broaden their horizons about the range of opportunities available to them. Some respondents, however, stressed the need for work placements and work experience to be relevant to students' interests, and many programs included both for developing different employability skills.

Respondents also advocated putting work placements and work experience into a context for students. While there is an obvious link for students who are engaged in industry-based certificate courses or VCE Industry and Enterprise, younger or disengaged students may not be able to see the connection with employability skills so easily. Therefore, some respondents conducted interviews or class discussions with students prior to organising placements. Others provided mentors for students during placements and/or provided follow-up counselling and discussion at school. Many also included industry seminars and visits or guest presenters in the school-based programs. One respondent used the term 'round table discussion sessions' for students to debrief about visits to industry and Rotary meetings.

Selection of employers for these work placements was also thought to be very important, since good employers can assist in identifying student concerns. Yet finding suitable employers was said to be difficult at times, since there is a lack of

knowledge in schools about work experience and employers who are willing to be involved. It was acknowledged, however, that there are many supportive employers but also much competition now for work placements. It was stressed that school timetabling also needs to complement the work placement (see also pp. 117–119).

Another important issue raised was how to increase employer involvement. More placements were needed, particularly for younger students, and students needed access to other young people in the workforce to act as role models. In addition, as full-time employment for youth was scarce, there was a need to develop more apprenticeship and traineeship links, for example, through group training companies, to provide genuine work experience as part of education policy. Many respondents were keen to develop better partnerships with employers. Yet, while advocating promotion of the benefits of employer involvement for young people, they also acknowledged a need for greater incentives for employers. One person suggested appealing to their moral obligations associated with marketing their products to youth. Another comment focused on employment agencies and their need to become much more 'friendly'.

Success stories

Requested to describe a program that has made a difference to wellbeing and engagement in learning, or that has provided a focus for future directions in education, training or employment for at risk young people, respondents were especially enthusiastic. Several success stories, at least one from each Area Program, are included below. All names provided are pseudonyms.

A female, Year 10 student – Koori – had no idea what she wanted to do and was losing her way in school. She completed 'Introduction to Beauty' (ten modules) at (a TAFE Institute) *and is now clear that she loves the work involved and wants to do it. She's not unrealistic – she knows the work in the field is hard to find but she will be persistent.*

Di was identified in Year 11 as having fairly low literacy and interpersonal skills, and was in danger of not fulfilling her potential at school. While the traditional VCE was not desirable or applicable, Di enthusiastically participated in the Futures' Program and achieved outstanding results.

A student struggled to come to school. He was either late or did not come (and was) *failing his school work. He had no commitment, just was not interested. He had one-to-one support to see and to believe in himself. He had interview training skills* (and) *practised and practised. This young boy is going to TAFE ... He is good with his hands. He is doing a metal fabrication course. Gets up at 6:30, catches a bus and train. Does not miss TAFE and is passing his grades. I am delighted.*

X is a 15 year old young woman who didn't get along with teachers and had just been evicted along with her family from their home. She

understandably hated the world. Clearly, someone at risk of not only leaving school early but a bit more serious consequences too. Our FSS program provided her with a life-line in simple consistency in her life. She developed over time rapport with staff who were understanding of her situation and had the flexibility within the program to cater for her needs. She changed from a bitter young woman to someone who began to laugh, enjoy school and began to believe in her abilities.

Year 10 male student who, at the start of the year, made very clear comments about leaving school within the term because school and teachers 'sucks'. He had no commitment to do homework and had already been suspended twice. He said he only came to school to socialise. Within several weeks of being in the ... program, it was clear he had behavioural issues, poor self-esteem and little regard to school rules. As the program developed, he asked many questions and attended the one-to-one support. He was willing to try different strategies. His self-esteem form filled out term by term showed a steady increase. Teachers' comments were more positive. He has not been suspended since being in the program. He now has clear goals; he knows what he could achieve. He looks at alternatives and has enrolled for VCE in 2001. He states he has 'learnt to be a student'; he has learnt life is what you make it. His mother reported she has noticed a remarkable change. Homework has increased not only in the subjects he enjoys and he has wishes of being involved in the School Leadership program for 2001 so he can help other students who have the same negative attitudes that he once had.

In 1999, a Year 9 student faced a very early exit from school for high truancy, multiple suspensions and low acceptance within the peer group. Towards the end of 2000, the same student will successfully complete Year 10, has not been suspended, enjoys going to school and has held down a part-time job. The student's improvement in literacy and numeracy has impressed teachers and subsequently he has been recommended for Year 11 in 2001.

*Steve joined the alternative program two years ago with a very low self-concept. He had a history of low academic achievement and came from an abusive background. Steve could not relate to peers or adults. Two years later Steve has almost completed his Year 12 alternative program, including passing several VCE subjects he thought he was too 'dumb' to attempt. Steve has successfully completed two rounds of work experience and participated successfully in every 'outsourced' course offered to him, including Responsible Service of Alcohol, Food and Beverage Service, Food Preparation and job readiness courses. Steve's self-esteem has improved. He can now mix with adults and peers quite confidently. He doesn't 'smell' any more and in fact has been one of the better groomed students of (*late*). Steve has also applied for several jobs, although he has yet to be lucky. Steve is one of our success stories.*

A student who on completing Year 9 did not want to return to school. He found it boring and not meeting his needs. On entering the Year 10 alternative program, he found new incentive, was able to improve his literacy skills and develop skills that were relevant to the workplace. His view of what his goals were altered and his improved relationship with staff enabled him to continue into VCE where he has undertaken a VET subject as well. The study skills program at Year 11 has meant that he is accessing assistance on a regular basis and maintaining a positive teacher/student relationship.

*C became involved with (*the program*) at the start of 2000. He had already completed two years of VCE and needed a third to be successful. He was about to become a father and was going to drop out of school. There was a lot of anger as his ex-girlfriend didn't tell him of the pregnancy and he was not part of the birth or christening. The youth worker (being a male with 2 young children) was able to relate to C and encourage the completion of VCE as a means to be in a position of strength to have access to his daughter. Legal advice was sought and amicable access visiting arranged. An application for an independent living allowance was successful and C now has goals for the future after completing VCE. He sees his daughter weekly.*

STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS

The following alternative programs were described as largely successful by the student focus groups convened in each region. Information about these programs forms the substance of the rest of this chapter. One program is described from each of the following: Bendigo, Brimbank/Hume, Darebin/Moreland, East Gippsland/Latrobe/Wellington and Greater Geelong while two programs are described from each of Casey/Dandenong and Frankston/Peninsula. Comments from a student focus group at BAYSA are also included.

***A vocationally-oriented program** (Program A) offered over Years 9 and 10.*

Work placement is an important feature of this program. The curriculum includes alternative English and Maths classes and various other units such as Life Skills – together with mainstream classes. Overall, there were few criticisms of the program, although students were expressly invited to voice these. A typical comment was 'I wouldn't really change anything', though one person suggested that people should not have to take some of the mainstream subjects, such as Science, that they were currently compelled to do. More electives, for example, in Computers, Physical Education and Electronics, should be available they said. A request for increasing the work experience component of the program was also made. Yet 'compared to mainstream, it's so much better' one student commented.

Six students (two girls and four boys) described this program.

***A vocationally-oriented program** (Program B) offered for Year 10 students.*

Work placement is again an important feature of this program. The curriculum consists of alternative English, Maths and Social Studies classes and various other units such as Life Skills – together with a small number of mainstream electives. Overall, there were no criticisms of Program B, only a wish that all school programs could be more like it and that more students could enter it. It was said that such programs should exist from Years 7 and 8 onwards, and that mainstream teachers should listen to students more, in the way that Program B teachers did.

Two students (a girl and a boy) described this program.

***A job preparation program** (Program C) for Years 9-11 students.*

Work placement is again an important feature of this program. Consisting of a number of modules, the program provides career guidance and practical assistance in, for example, writing resumés, managing money, filling out forms and interview preparation. It occupies students for up to almost two hours per week, during which time they miss out on some Outdoor Education, Information Technology and Religious Instruction classes that are part of their mainstream program. This seems not to worry them ('the more hours the better' because they 'get more work done'), since they believe they can catch up with the study of computers next year. Asked about whether the program was meeting their expectations, the unanimous answer was 'yes'. Getting a certificate for the two years of the program was also appreciated, as was learning about presenting themselves at interview, including what to wear, and how to conduct themselves at work, particularly how to talk to 'the boss'. Resumé writing and career guidance were also important to them. The program had apparently helped them significantly in all these areas. Asked what they would change, the only comments were 'more work experience' and 'I don't think there's any changes from my point of view'. Overall, it seemed to be agreed that the program was good for people who were both university and workforce bound and had assisted them considerably in both social and work-related skills.

Six male students described this program.

***A 'future options' program** (Program D) offered for Years 9 and 10 students.*

This program is integrated with the mainstream program. Each student is individually assessed, so that one person might have a special English class, say, with a very small number of students, while another might undertake mainstream English. Eventually, it was said, the school might have a separate program. The program involves excursions to workplaces, such as tyre and cigarette factories, as often as twice a week, First Aid, and many out-of-school activities such as go-carting, canoeing, camping, rock climbing, swimming and learning to drive – 'fun stuff'. Work in school is related to planning and organising these activities, writing papers, 'we do all the booklets on First Aid and all that' and, for getting a job, 'We do research on the web, web-sites, what jobs are there, make resumés'. Students are able to exercise a degree of choice in where they want to go and in

what they do, and work mainly with three teachers. Special Maths, English, Science and Computer Studies are also a part of the program. It was generally described by students as 'good the way it is', but some felt they should be given the opportunity to do more academic work along with other students (see p. 73).

Five male students described this program.

***A case management program** (Program E) for Year 10+ students.*

This program assists students in locating suitable TAFE, or other programs, and involves working with a case manager, located in a community centre away from the school. This person also runs small group tutoring, and an after-school study program, and liaises closely with teachers and other community agencies. Students said that it 'helped us with motivation to stay at school' and that 'it's good working with (the case manager)'. They also learn 'about life through involvement in this program: jobs and things'. One student had attended a building course, another an art and drama course and another typing. Students said that they would recommend the program to other students and that it was certainly worth continuing.

Six students in Year 10 and three young people who had left school (4 girls and 5 boys in all) described this program.

***A personal development program** (Program F) for Year 11 students.*

This program is exclusively for girls, and is conducted away from the school. The program lasts for 10 weeks, occupying Monday and Tuesday of each week, and involves students in confidence-building activities often associated with body-image (having a 'make-over' and belly dancing) and self and cultural awareness. Bush walking and going on excursions are also an important part of the program which was said to be overwhelmingly successful. Indicating the strength of their positive feelings about the program, one person said: 'We just cried and everything because we knew it was ending'. A typical comment was: 'I reckon the course is better than school. You learn a lot more here than you do there'. All said they would certainly recommend the program to other students and one explained,

> *I think they should do the program all the time. I think any girl that would do it would enjoy it. I enjoyed it and I know everyone else enjoyed it. You just learn heaps. I don't think you need to change anything about it. Just the people are really good.*

Of a follow-up program, students were disappointed that it only involved half-days and there was too little time to include all the activities they enjoyed so much – 'trying to squeeze everything in'.

Three students in Year 11 described this program.

An enterprise teams program *(Program G) for Year 10 students.*

These students had been working in four groups of three or four, for six hours per week, occupying Monday (first four periods) and Thursday (last two periods), over five months, in the second semester of the year. The girls worked in a separate team and there were 15 students in the class in total. Students had been designing and making products (in wood) to sell, with each team making a different product, including toy boxes, wine boxes, letterboxes, bird boxes and coffee tables. The students said that their teacher was going to see if he could take orders for the products at the local market. One group said that they were also trying to get their products into shop windows and sell them by door knocking. For the first five weeks the students worked on designs, strategies for marketing and business plans. One student said: 'We try and design the best way on paper and then go from there'. Thus students acquire writing skills as an integral part of the program. These students did not like school and said that, if it were not for this program, they would have left. One said: 'the only reason I come to school on Mondays and Thursdays ... and the other days basically (is because of the enterprise program)'. Most said they would recommend the program to the current Year 9 students, particularly if they were struggling at school and were having difficulty reaching the target number of points to enter Year 10. One student explained:

> *I'd tell 'em to do it ... because if they don't like doing nothing, right ...* (and) *they've got no hope of passing, this would be good to interest them ...with this course we get a few extra points, as well for doing it ... It is designed to keep us at school basically.*

This program was described by two groups of four male students and one group of two female students.

A vocationally-oriented program *(Program H) for Years 9 and 10 students.*

This program is a modification of mainstream curriculum in that students are studying only seven instead of nine subjects, five of which include Maths, English and Science. The program includes one day of work placement. Students also learn computer skills, including how to use the Internet, and work preparation skills, such as how to write a resumé. The program includes a three day adventure camp in the first week of the school year that is based around cohorts of Year Nine boys, Year Nine girls, Year 10 boys and Year 10 girls. The students believe that taking fewer subjects is more manageable – there is not as much homework. All students agreed that if it were not for the program they would be failing. One said he would be back in his old school (private) repeating Year 8. They were very positive about the level of support they were receiving in the program, that is, 'One hundred percent support', including: 'How to find a job – just everything'; 'Helping us with school work'; and 'You can get a part-time job out of it'.

This program was described by nine Year 9 students, four girls and five boys.

A vocationally-oriented program (Program I) for Year 9 students

This program has a modified timetable on a Thursday for theatre studies and includes a work placement. The students also mentioned that half the group studied Maths for a semester whilst the other half studied English. Next semester, they would swap around. Sometimes they went on excursions, for example, visits to TAFE Institutes. The students, however, could not really see the point of theatre studies. Only one student liked this activity. Others commented that they would have preferred to 'catch up on school work'. But because some students 'mucked around ... they took that away from us'. All appreciated the 'enhanced program' though because the work is easier to understand and 'in the normal class we have been struggling and failing'. This was reflected clearly in the students' responses to the question: 'Where do you think you would be if this program were not running?' A typical answer was: 'I would be either in Year 7 or would have dropped out'.

This program was reported on by seven students, including two girls.

WHY JOIN AN ALTERNATIVE PROGRAM?

A range of reasons for joining alternative programs was provided by students, as detailed below. Prominent among these were failing at school, being unable to concentrate or getting into trouble in mainstream classes, needing extra help, being advised that this was a good program for them by teachers, counsellors, friends or parents, or being told that their only other option was to leave school. In general, where some element of student choice was involved, even if strong advice to join had been given, students appeared more positive about the process of entry and, in some cases, the program itself. Issues of access to such programs by students is also addressed under the section 'Problematic Issues' (see p. 75). Selection of students into a program by teachers is contrasted with an approach that offers an alternative program(s) to all students and parents and places the choice with them, given extensive consultation and advice.

Program A: Some students said that they were chosen to join the program because of a history of school failure and/or a lack of confidence to proceed to the following year in mainstream ('I'm not that smart'). Others were getting into 'heaps and heaps of trouble' in mainstream classes and were not paying attention to class-work. 'I was just mucking around all the time'. For another student, teachers thought there would be benefit in a 'good hands-on experience' and another was picked to 'come on the program because I wanted to leave and get a job'. Parents were usually said to be supportive of the program ('My mum thought it would be good for me'), which was seen by some as the only alternative to leaving school for ever ('I'd heard some rumours that we'd get kicked out'). Thus most of these students had wanted to remain in school ('I don't want to be a no-hoper'), but thought, without the program, that staying on to Years 11 and 12 was not a realistic

option. The program afforded them a second chance and was seen in the school as the only alternative to leaving school forever ('Once you start working you never get back'). One student said:

> *My mum and dad were ... like, at the end of Year 9, they were like sick of me. They didn't know what to do with me ... And then* (Program A) *offers ... And I said '*(Program A) *is going to help me finish Year 10 and then I want to go on to Year 11'.*

Program B: Students reported joining the program by volunteering because they wanted to learn but were unable to do so in mainstream classes, primarily because other students were so disruptive. 'I didn't really like school and I still don't ... but I didn't want to be a bum'. Having 'a lot to prove to myself and my family', 'helping me come out and not be shy' and 'going down-hill' were also mentioned as reasons for volunteering.

Program C: Students had volunteered for the program when it was explained to them that it would help them get ready for a job and 'help me analyse my future after VCE'. Other students had also recommended the program. One student said: 'I decided I wanted to do it because basically I want to get out of school as soon as possible', and another commented, 'any opportunity I have to get a job will help'. They had anticipated that it would give them greater confidence in going for a job interview, knowing what questions they might be asked and what questions they should ask of employers.

Program D: Some students said that they were chosen to join the program because of having 'a hard time at school'. Some felt they had no option but to join the program when it was explained to them that it was, 'about getting a job and all that stuff you know'. 'Last year my report wasn't good, it was real bad. I had no choice ... If I didn't go in it I would have to leave the school'. Another student reported that a condition of his returning to the school, after they had 'shift(ed) house'... 'and the other school ... wouldn't let me in ... because they thought I was bad and dumb', was that he joined the program. Indeed some students were quite bitter that there was no choice but to join the program and felt that it was preventing them from undertaking those subjects that would eventually lead to the VCE (see also section on Problematic Issues, p. 73). Others had volunteered to be in the program themselves but, they said, it was only offered to 'the special ones'. Some thought they could leave the program if they wanted to. Others thought they could not.

Program E: One student said: 'I found out about it in the (school) newsletter'. Another said: 'I was starting to fail my subjects so I needed help'.

Program F: One student had been told about the program by a friend, who had seen a notice about it on a bulletin board. The student then went to the careers teacher who arranged for her to join. 'The stuff that she said we would be doing sounded good. I thought I would give it a go'. Another student joined the program on the recommendation of the counsellor who thought it would help her to meet new people. The third student was called into the office and provided with

information about it that 'didn't really sound that good'. It just had a list of 'all the lectures of the people coming in. They didn't really sound interesting'. Two other students with her refused the invitation. None of her friends had known about the program.

Program G: One girl said that she had volunteered for the program because she 'needed help with her schooling and it got (her) extra points'. She also had trouble staying in class. Parents were also influential in some students joining the program. For example:

> *Mum just reckons it's good for me. Because I didn't want to go to school. I said I didn't want to go because I have this class and this class today. It just makes you want to go, because if they put maybe two periods or a period every day of the week it would be better maybe. We would have a period each day to look forward to.*

It seemed, however, that many students had little choice but to join the program.

Program H: Some students were encouraged to join, or were 'offered a place' in the program because they were not 'doing well' at school. Options were discussed with the student. If a student agreed to undertake the program, a letter was sent home to parents and a parent-teacher interview arranged. Others were not given a choice and told that they had to 'do it or leave'. Some students who began the program in Year 9 continued on into Year 10. Two students commented: 'If you're in Year 9 and they see that you're improving a little bit, they might put you into Year 10. If you are not doing well at the end of the semester, they will put you back in (the program)' and 'I was doing well last year but was told that it was still helping me so I am doing really well now that I am doing the program'.

Program I: Students found out about the program via notices sent home to their parents and a follow-up information session at the school. One student had been in a 'special enhanced class since Year 7'. Others came into the program at the beginning of Year 9 after achieving poorly in Year 8. For example, one young person explained the situation as follows: 'I wasn't doing that well and one of the teachers said "you can start at Year 9 and learn about apprenticeships and jobs" and I got into it'. Another said '(I) basically failed Year 8 and it was either go up (to Year 9), do the program, or all the way back to Year 7. So Mum said, "Do the program"'.

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS IDENTIFIED BY STUDENTS

Many interrelated characteristics of alternative programs are seen by students to be very important to their success, students' comments echoing much of the literature on social connectedness, vocational learning and education and training, and the centrality of student-teacher (and peer) relationships in promoting wellbeing (see pp. 32–33). It appears then that, for these alternative programs

(with one notable exception), the curriculum as intended and designed by teachers, that is, the 'teaching curriculum', appears largely consistent with the 'learning curriculum' as described by the students questioned (see p. 43). For potential early leavers, however, in many mainstream classes, this appears not to be the case.

Extra help in small classes

In Program A, extra individual attention, smaller classes (20 students instead of 30), a smaller group of teachers working with them, and thus better relationships with teachers, were all cited as very important in improved achievement and learning. Indeed, class size emerged as a critical success factor in most student focus groups, with the mainstream classroom being depicted by Program B students as 'thirty odd people screaming out "help me teacher" and it is so hard to concentrate'. Thus having smaller classes was seen by students as crucial for their achievement. This had to be accompanied by positive teacher attitudes, however, as seen below. As students in Program C explained: 'The teacher gets around to see you, not like when you're in a big class' and 'The teacher has more quality time with each person'. Students could get their questions answered straight away without having to wait for others who also required help. In a large class, they said, it's easy to get distracted, play around more and fall behind. 'They (students) don't know what they're doing and they fail ... they stress too much'. They noted that some teachers in large classes try to be helpful but it is impossible for them to provide all the assistance required by so many students. In Program E, too, one student was particularly grateful for the assistance of the case manager 'if I get stuck'.

Patient teachers who use positive discipline

A consistent theme among Program A students was that their teachers were very helpful and patient, letting students proceed at their own pace and make some decisions about what they wanted to learn. As one student explained:

> *Well, you still have timelines for handing assignments and stuff in, but just say you didn't hand it in on time, like you didn't understand it, they will maybe explain it to you and give you a second chance.*

They noted that their teachers had volunteered for the program, understood them and were sensitive to their needs. They 'understand where we're coming from' and '... even if you do stuff up, they give you another chance'. Others commented: 'The teachers are our friends more – not just our teachers. They want to know what we like and don't like' and 'You sort of get to know all the teachers'. Not all mainstream teachers were seen as being fair to students and an argument with a teacher had led to the temporary suspension of one of the students. Some comments made about mainstream teachers included: 'Some of the teachers should really pay attention to the students'; '... after the years they have been working here they just get sick of kids just doing nothing'; '... they concentrate on those going to Uni because no one else cares' and 'Some teachers are very condescending towards us so it's hard to want to do work for someone like that'. They said that mainstream

teachers should listen to them more, in the way their alternative program teachers did. There was acceptance, however, among some students that they had sometimes been rude to mainstream teachers, thus provoking their negative responses. The mutuality of respect between students and teachers was emphasised as essential for learning.

Program B students also noted that teachers in their program were extremely helpful, patient and friendly. As one of the students commented:

> *All the teachers are great ... really help you a lot. If you're struggling, they'll sit down with you and, just individually, fifteen minutes if it takes that ... and they will explain it until you get it.*

Indeed, a number of students reported that, with this kind of extensive help from teachers, 'brilliant results' could be achieved, which 'makes you think you can actually do it'. Yet the extra time devoted to them was not the only reason for successful outcomes; teachers in these programs actually showed that they understood and empathised with their students. As one of the students explained of their teachers:

> *It was more that they felt what we felt: they knew what we were thinking. If we were down they would know that we were down. If we needed help they would know when to help us.*

'Social capital' was being made available to these students through a considerable 'investment' of attention, care and support by these teachers (see p. 37).

This situation was contrasted with the behaviour and attitudes of many mainstream teachers who were thought to believe of students and their work that 'if they're not going to do it, they can just get out'. They reported that, frequently, students were sent out into the corridor after the teacher had said: 'I can't teach you, just get out'. Their Program B teachers, on the other hand, might say, '"Go outside, get some fresh air, and then come back in. Calm down a little". But they will sit down with you and they will help you'. Working with the same small group of teachers was also seen to be very helpful to students and the good relationship established between students and teachers crucial to learning.

Students in Program D noted that their teachers were 'not as strict as teachers ... they don't care what we do'. 'Yeah, we get in their car and they drive us around'. One person admitted 'I got into a bit of trouble outside of school and one of the teachers helped me'. This informality of the teachers in alternative programs was summed up by a student in Program F who, having expressed her initial fear of being judged in the program, explained that she was soon helped to relax when the person in charge introduced herself by her Christian name. Of this person, it was also said: 'You can talk to her about everything because you know she will listen, She won't think you stupid'. They also mentioned how 'nice' and caring people were and that they had 'fun'. Indeed it seemed that even learning from books was acceptable in this program. Asked about how the course differed from

school, and illustrating the importance of providing an adult learning environment, as mentioned by Ward et al. (1998), another student in Program F said:

> *I think the worst thing at school is the way the teachers treat you like kids. Once you are down here, it's really different. Everyone treats you like you are older.*

Here, they reported, 'you never have anyone say you shouldn't do something'. Resentment against mainstream teachers was also expressed in the following comments: 'They tell you you can't do this and they are not very well organised and they tell us we have to be organised' and 'They don't respect what you think'. In the program, however, they had learned to trust others to listen when they talked about their difficulties whereas, at school 'a student rebelled just to get the message across, and it gets you into more trouble whereas, down here, you don't have to do it'. Of careers teachers, one student in Program H implied that they needed to provide more guidance in job searching: 'All they do is chuck you the Yellow Pages and say look it up' while, in Program I, students said that they wanted more help than 'Let's go to the computer and look up jobs'.

Thus the social learning curriculum for students in alternative programs appeared highly constructive, in contrast with their experiences of mainstream schooling. In a student group at BAYSA, however, asked about their views of schools and teachers, it seemed that the general opinion was that school was not so bad (though teachers were a bit 'uptight'). Rather, it was other issues that created problems for them with which schools were not equipped to deal (see also p. 29 in relation to the Connors Report). For example, if the young person confides in a teacher, it was said: 'It doesn't go higher – it just goes around', that is, teachers talk about it in the staff-room but do not necessarily have the contacts to help provide appropriate assistance. One student also commented that some teachers seemed to approach their work as 'just a job', in spite of telling them that 'the main reason you're at school is socialising skills'. Such teachers did not approach their work as 'I'm teaching this kid like ... the ways of life and stuff like that'. This disparity was described as 'weird' and indicates the importance of teachers acting as positive role models for young people, a point also stressed by Gambone (1993).

Curriculum focus on the nature of work – new identities on offer

Work placement was seen as a very important aspect of all the programs in which it featured, with new and valued identities being clearly seen to be on offer (Wenger, 1998). Students could also choose among them. For example, one student in Program A explained: 'You get to learn about the workforce, and you can get an idea of jobs and if you don't want to do them, instead of just going for an apprenticeship and all that'. All students in Program A had a choice of work placement, in which they could 'get good hands-on experience' for a whole day each week and understand how tiring and 'hard the work is'. Learning to deal with responsibility was another important aspect of the work placement. Examples

of work placement sites included a golf shop, a veterinary hospital and Safeway. One student commented: 'I'm working with an electrician and it's lots of fun'.

Similarly, students in Program B had a choice of work placements in which they could 'learn about the real world out there' This part of the program was designed, they said, to help them get the careers they wanted and understand the implications of their choices, for example, very early morning starts for some jobs. Indeed the work placement was emphasised as a major strength of the program.

Students in Program C affirmed that, if the work experience component of the program were not there, they would probably have left school, but without a sense of direction. 'You don't know what you want to do when you're in school', one student said. They had also learnt that, if one work experience site was not 'that good', they could still maintain a positive attitude towards the next one. You can 'pick a winner' and find out 'what's better for your future'. Sometimes teachers arranged the placement, although one person said it makes it easier 'if you've got connections'. Students mentioned working on a dairy farm, at a golf park, at the credit union and with a graphic designer and a retailer. Asked what might make them less 'sick of school', one student commented: 'not doing Maths, Science, English and Religious Instruction because it's boring and it's not going to help me in the future'. Maths to Year 10 standard was considered all that was required. They wanted more outdoor activities and the chance to undertake more practical, vocationally-oriented subjects. Indeed, they thought that a wider range of vocational programs would help to keep many students in the school. Nevertheless, one student admitted that it was not so much that school was unpleasant but rather that work seemed more appealing. 'School's not so bad. I'm pretty anxious to go out and work'.

Program H students were involved in work placements in retail, trucking and cabinet making, which most students apparently enjoyed, saying how well they were treated. One young person made the point that the work placement in the middle of the week helped him to concentrate on school better, and to be more motivated, because it provided 'a break from school work – it divides up the week easier so you get a day in the middle of the week instead of having to wait the whole week'. A student who wanted to be a mechanic really enjoyed his work placement because he was 'learning to put cars back together'. This, he said, was 'way better' than school. It had given him a clearer sense of direction about what he wanted to do when he left, as it had with another student who said: 'I have done two jobs now. I have been a panel beater and a mechanic. I like the mechanic way better'. One student added that work experience may sometimes lead to casual work over the holidays. Students can request a particular type of work placement that the careers teacher tries to find for them, or they can do their own job search. Yet there were mixed feelings about work placements in Program H (see section on Problematic Issues, p. 76).

Excursions to workplaces were also valued by students in Program C and one person from Program D mentioned enjoying a visit to a factory because, 'they show us what they do, like what mechanics do, and if we want to get an

apprenticeship as a mechanic, how to get in it and what's it all about'. It was said that the school could get an apprenticeship for people straight away if they wanted one. Program H students also liked going on excursions because they provided insight into what certain occupations and workplaces were like. For example, one student liked the visit to an animal shelter because of a desire to be a 'vet'. Another recalled a visit to a city hotel where they learned about food and beverage service and housekeeping. The students listed where they would like to go at the beginning of the year and the teacher organised a schedule of visits. Similarly, in Program I, students thought that visits to TAFE were useful. One said:

> *That actually gave me a good perspective because I went there on Open Day last year – I didn't get a good look around, I just got information. Then when I saw it actually inside ... There was a lady giving us a tour. She was answering questions and she was showing us different areas ... it's got mostly every area that we want.*

Curriculum focus on the needs of adolescents in their transition to adulthood

Many students in Program A reported changes in their attitudes, for example, 'I work a lot better that I used to because I'm not as distracted ... I used to muck around and annoy the teachers', but 'I've grown up a bit'. One young person reflected: 'I realised I'm not ready to go into the workforce yet' and another, of developing good student-teacher relationships, made the point that:

> *You get to learn a lot more about the teachers and the teachers get to know you a lot more. You stop mucking around and try to get an education. You just learn that it will help you in the long run.*

Another young person summed up a change in attitude by saying: 'You get to respect school a lot more after you've been in the program'. As one of the students in Program B said:

> *Becoming 15, 16, getting older, you should be able to see the world differently, you should know certain things and you should be able to act your age and be able to do things ... and, you know, just be more mature and learn when to and when not to, and make sure that you know how it all works and stuff like that. That's what (*Program B*) did.*

In mainstream, it was felt that teachers did not help them to learn these things. Both said they now stayed after school to complete their work. One student from Program D explained how, 'In term two, I used to skip school, but now I don't'. Another said 'we see it for our future to go to school to get good marks. Like if we go for a job, they want to see our reports'. Similarly, in Program F, students said they were learning to cope much better with school, through the program. One student reflected: 'I think I tend to get along with more teachers now. I still argue with some of them but most of them not as much'. She continued, in relation to her understanding gained from the course:

I think you realise that teachers aren't just teachers. They are not always yelling; they actually are normal people and so I try and focus on that more than the fact that they are teachers.

Another person spoke of the difficulty of negotiating the transition from primary school where much greater freedom had been allowed. In secondary school she was always getting into trouble. She said that she was 'working on it' now, however, whereas before she 'didn't really care'. Once she had been 'on the verge of quitting'; now she wants to 'make a change, start good from the start of the year'. Of a teacher who had been annoyed about one of them attending the program, this student commented: 'we get along better but I don't think he realises why'.

Yet one student in Program D, illustrating, perhaps, a rather optimistic view of the workforce for many early leavers said: 'Sometimes I think school is a waste of time. You should be working and making money and like getting a start and getting experience. You will (then) get a better job and when you grow up you will be in an office of your own'. In addition, a student in Program H made the point that the program, and indeed school, was not suited to everyone:

For some people it just doesn't work because they are smart at other things. They are not necessarily good at things you learn at school but they are at other things. They become famous models or singers and they don't teach you that at school. So school isn't for everyone. I am serious.

Variety of enjoyable learning activities

That the modules in Program C kept providing students with different experiences was much valued. 'I believe you keep on learning' one person said. Activities particularly appreciated were the work experience and resumé writing (including videos about how to do this). Students described Program D as 'fun' and said that it had changed their minds about coming to school. 'Fun stuff' includes outdoor activities such as go-carting, canoeing, camping, rock climbing, swimming and learning to drive. In Program E, also, one student enthused: 'We're having fun ... like in drama, we're going to put on a play'.

In Program F, a variety of activities and doing something never before experienced were also mentioned as important. 'We went down just beside the lake and we just did meditation and we just lay there in the sun and she just talked to you ...'. 'The walk, the people, just learning stuff about different cultures ... It was so nice and fresh ... And just the noises. The sound of the birds'. Meeting different types of people was also mentioned as enjoyable: 'he made you smile and he was so funny ... he was different'. To get away from school was also important, and 'basically it was like an excursion from school'. The openness of the other students, the recognition that they all have problems of some kind, the chance to talk with adults as well as students, knowing that the confidentiality of the disclosure would be respected, and the acknowledgment of learning outside the classroom, were also valued. They thought the program was much better than they had ever expected. Asked about what made it 'better', one person said:

Meeting new people and learning about self-esteem ... We did a thing with the Aborigines and we learnt ... it was amazing, you just get to learn. They just told you all these stories ...

In Program G, students said that they liked the idea of the enterprise program because it was fun or at least 'a bit more interesting'. One person commented: '... you learn stuff from the classroom very much more when you're enjoying what you're doing'. Two students said the program was more exciting than the other subjects they were studying. One explained that the woodwork class was different because:

The woodwork course isn't really like a class because you don't get told to go in, sit down, and shut up type of thing. You just get going there and do what you want ...walk around and get your wood ... at you leisure. If you want a break, you can have a break without anyone saying 'Get back to work'.

The students explained that the technology subjects in the school worked in much the same way. One of the girls who had no previous experience with woodwork said she enjoyed the course because it 'was fun and a reason to stay in class'. She added later that if she were not in this course she would 'be doing all I can to get out of my other classes'. Another girl in the same team agreed.

Opportunities for learning new work and life skills

In Program A, students appreciated subjects such as Life Skills and Social Studies, where they were learning about, for example, peer pressure and sexuality, how to buy a car and not be 'ripped off', house purchase, how to treat people, leaving home and spending money wisely. Not being pressured into undertaking subjects they didn't like, such as Science, was also valued. Students from Program C noted that the modules had helped a lot in teaching them 'to use time wisely' and understand what they are doing. 'You know more about yourself in different areas' one student said. Of work experience, numerous skills were listed relating to: stock-taking and the importance of good customer service in selling things; understanding how to care for grass on the golf greens and how to identify any developing problems; how to milk cows, put up fences, unroll hay and work with a tractor on the dairy farm; how to scan a design into the computer (his design had been put onto a T-shirt) and how to use tools properly.

Life-saving and First Aid were thought to be 'good to learn' in Program D, as was obtaining a learner's licence to drive. Students were actually able to practise their driving at school. Survivor skills were also mentioned and the certificates gained for swimming and some other activities were clearly appreciated, as was work on 'teasing, race harassment'. In Program E, learning skills away from the school was seen as better 'because it's less stress and a lot easier to do your work' and, in Program G, it was said that the freedom to move about and talk in a team environment helped them to learn skills and to develop relationships. Indeed, it seemed that they had become valued participants in a community of practice. One of the girls explained:

It's like you're not sitting down having to shut up the whole time. You move around and you've got to talk because you are in a team, and so, you can go and get ideas off other teams. You talk to them more... And like, they'll come up and give you tips on what you're doing wrong or right.

There was also another incentive for working here too. The students were promised a share of any profits. It was recognised, however, that it takes time to develop ideas, strategies and a sense of team, though one student was particularly enthusiastic about the team skills that had been developed in one group: '(You) see how you can work as a team ... seeing what each other can do, what each other is best at and to use each other to the best advantage'. They were also learning some business acumen. As one of them reflected:

If you could think of something that you could make that doesn't cost that much to make but which you can sell for a high price. Because by the time we bought all our little hooks and hinges and handles it all added up to the price that we wanted to sell it for. We weren't going to make any profit. A few little mistakes had to be fixed up.

And indicating their commitment to the work involved in the program, they expressed irritation with some of their friends coming in to the class to see what they were doing. 'They get in the way', one person said.

Learning to work with others and make friends

It was noted in Program B that the group was becoming like a team or family, with friends becoming 'inseparable'. Indeed, the program was said to be especially supportive of close relationships. For example, students explained that they often went to parties together and that they were acquiring 'real good people skills'.

One person explained:

*I didn't have any friends and (*Program B*) helped me make a lot of friends and so, yeah, Year 11 is a lot better because I know a lot more people and because we have our VCE and socialise and stuff ... When I went into (Program B) I didn't know anyone in the class really, but by the end of the year I was better friends with everyone. Like, we were a team, like a family ... helped each other out ....*

Enjoyment in learning was mentioned frequently in Program D, as was the confidence to speak in front of a group. In addition, working with a partner on a number of projects was said to help to develop team skills and self-organisation. Some examples of the importance of teamwork and getting on well with others in workplaces were discussed, including the situation for a bouncer in a night club. 'Because if you don't like the other security and all these people come to attack you, the other security won't help you. But if you like them, you know, they will come and help you'. Getting a better understanding of people was also mentioned. In Program F, of the type of activities used, one person explained, of her relationships with another student:

... it brings you closer together. When we first started, me and Y were fighting, but as the weeks went by, I just realised how pathetic it was because there's no point in fighting with someone when you can get along and it just makes you realise, the activities we did, how important people are to you.

It was thought, however, to be good to keep the program exclusive to girls because, as one person said: 'I think it's harder to talk about things when they (boys) are there. They come up with really smart aleck comments and they don't realise it'.

In Program H, students reported that the camp had achieved its purpose, that is, to develop relationships: 'I have made a lot more friends with the guys from my grade. I had seen them around but I wasn't very good friends (before the camp)'. Similarly, in Program I, it was suggested that the program helped to develop interpersonal skills, for example: 'You learn to get on with each other' and 'You get to understand what they (others) like and basically what they hate'.

Opportunities for acquiring identities of competence

From failing most subjects, many students in Program A were starting to achieve quite well ('I'm going good in everything'), and appreciated the extra help afforded. 'It actually helps you pass other subjects'. It was emphasised that while there isn't as much pressure to perform in these alternative subjects, 'it's not just a bludge'. Similarly, one of the students in Program B said:

I got my first A in all of my schooling, I got my first A+, and my parents were so proud. We read a book and we did a text response on it and it was really hard. It was Schindler's List. We watched a movie on it. That was really difficult and I got through it. And I got help with it and everything and we had the opportunity. (My friends) *stayed after school to get help. They all got As and Bs and stuff.* (The teacher) *made time for them after school to help them out because they didn't get enough time in class, but they did what they could. And, like, an hour's lesson with the teacher and ... they came out with brilliant results.*

Thus from failing most subjects, these students were starting to achieve highly. The other student commented:

The best thing I reckon was learning that we could achieve, we could do it, that I could do it, that I myself could finally do something like oral talks. I could actually get up and talk in front of everyone and not sit there and, you know. I was learning. I had never learnt like that before.

Opportunities for acquiring identities of confidence

A theme running through most of the focus group discussions was that of developing confidence through the program and building positive identities for the future. Indeed, many of these programs seemed to have become sites for constructive communities of practice, learning communities, in which student participation was valued and a sense of belonging achieved. Once more these students were becoming connected to school.

For example, although a few students were still failing in certain subjects in Program A, it was acknowledged that confidence had increased during the program ('I'm a lot more confident now') and they felt able to continue their schooling. As one student explained: 'If you'd asked me last year, I'd have told you I was going to be a dole bludger for the rest of my life'. Having experienced the program, he was going to stay on. Low self-esteem was apparently endemic among students in Program A in the initial stages of the program but their experiences had changed this. 'People didn't know they had it in them and (the program) showed them that they did', thus providing the sense of 'I can' highlighted by Fryer (2000). With pride, one student reported handing in every piece of work.

Increases in self-confidence were also reported in Program B. 'I'm a lot more confident to speak out, or hand in work and say when somebody's wrong and somebody's right. It's just raised my self-esteem a hell of a lot'. Similarly, in Program C, one student said: 'I feel more confident and can go and talk to people' and 'You sort of know what to say and what not to say'. Others too now felt that they could talk to an employer at interview without being nervous; they knew to have a 'back up line', 'if they get stuck', and could write down a list of questions to ask.

In Program F, one person noted the importance for confidence building of contributing to the design of the program, a key characteristic of adult learning environments. That their opinions were respected helped them to feel better about themselves.

> *I got more confidence from coming here. They always asked your opinion. They didn't actually have a full set program for us so we got to say what we wanted to do. Because teachers never ask you that. If they are going to bring in extra videos because you have nothing to do, they never ask a class what one they would like.*
>
> *With the school, you suggest something and they think you are an idiot. They tell you 'no, you are not doing that; just go away'. They just dismiss it without considering it.*

Confidence to speak in front of people had also increased quite markedly. One student said: 'I wasn't really talkative. I really wouldn't get up and stand up in front of everyone and now I can do that quite easily'. Others confessed still to being nervous, but not as much as before. One student explained how the person in charge had encouraged her to sing when she'd indicated her desire to become a singer. She described it thus:

> *Then one of the girls said, 'She really has a good voice' and I sang this song to X and she said I had a really good voice, and that really inspired me. It just made me feel so good. And these girls weren't laughing; they were just singing with me.*

The importance of a secure environment, free from teasing and put-downs, was also recognised in Program G, where students said that, apart from its being fun,

they felt safe and could thus develop confidence in their skills and relationships. The destructive effects of teasing are implicit in the following comment:

> *Confidence ... 'coz, like, say you're going (to a class) and you're really shy, everyone is gonna pick on you and you're going to hate the class. But no, I talk to everyone in* (this class) *so it's O.K.*

One of the girls suggested that a spin-off of working in a team (see also p. 70) was self-confidence, because communication was essential: 'you've got to talk because you are in a team, and so, you can go and get ideas off other teams. You talk to them more ...'. Students in Program H also said they felt more confident as a result of the program. This had occurred through: 'Developing people skills'; 'Getting out in the workforce'; and 'interacting with a lot of people besides school friends'.

PROBLEMATIC ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY STUDENTS

Class size

As indicated previously, small classes were much appreciated by students, and an increase in class size could create considerable resentment – so much so that students in Program D wished to exclude certain groups. 'You shouldn't have girls on the program. The first term, when we had 21 people, but now we have 31. Every week we have more people. We need to kick them all out'. Year 9 students were also not welcome. This resentment against newcomers was particularly related to not being able to receive as much attention from the teacher. 'Yeah because we go to classes and, shit, we waste a lot of time because it is a big class'. And 'the smaller the group the more the teachers pay attention to you. Bigger group, the teachers can't help'. In Program I, however, where students were split up for literacy and numeracy classes, one student indicated that, when this happens, very small classes (five people) can be boring.

Labelling

Some students indicated that they perceived themselves, and were perceived by others in the school, as 'dumb' because of their membership in alternative programs. For example, students from Program D explained that having freedom not to be at school all the time – with some free periods – 'makes us feel dumb ... yeah, you come to school and you see everyone working, and we are just wandering around the school'. They would 'rather be doing something' like the others. It was reported that, at first, friends outside the program had been jealous of them, in that they went on work experience and camps. Yet, when these friends found out what the program was really about (that is, that Program D students would not be sufficiently prepared to proceed to VCE), they taunted them with: 'Youse are losers; youse are no hopers'. This appears to be a major issue to be addressed by schools. As

Withers and Batten (1995) note, when alternative programs appear to be 'grafts' on the 'real' work of the school, many difficulties may arise.

Some students, however, had found different ways of looking at this issue. One of the students in Program B explained that perceptions in the school (and a personal perception before the program started) was 'that's the dumb class'. Now, though, this was seen not to be the case – although acknowledging that the type of Maths friends in mainstream were undertaking did look very difficult. Both students emphasised that 'we don't necessarily do easier work than anyone else'. For example, the books set and the questions responded to for English assignments are often the same as for the mainstream class. The difference was that they got extra help in tackling them. Similarly, a student in Program I explained: 'Sometimes people outside in normal classes, they sometimes say "You are in the dumb class". I'm not ashamed to be in it. I figure it's helping me to get through high school', and 'I don't classify it as a dumb class anyway. It's just an enhanced class. We just need a bit more help than others'. Actually, it was reported by one school, in responding to the second questionnaire that, when the curriculum was freed up to accommodate many alternative programs, the students participating in them did not stand out as being different. The solution appears to lie in curriculum, structural and cultural change in schools (see pp. 110–120).

Choice of entry

A number of students, in many of these programs, reported that they felt they had no option but to join (see also p. 91). Yet, for the most part, they had come to recognise the program's value. Some students in Program D, however, did not understand how it was helping them and interpreted their selection for it in the most negative way possible: 'The school doesn't care about us'; 'They don't give us a fair chance'; 'Pulled us out of real classes ... English, Science'; 'Treating us like Grade 6'; and 'They want us out of school'. This situation highlights the importance of information and advice being provided to both students and parents about an alternative program (and the pathways to which it leads), and the choice for a particular program residing with them. One person said: 'If you want to be a panel beater, a butcher or a dole bludger, go to (the program). If you want to be in a business suit, don't go to (the program)'. This may also illustrate the unrealistic expectations held by some young people, who need to be assisted in acknowledging the value of the trades, if that indeed is where their capacities lie. Again, cultural change in schools to appreciate many diverse pathways and options is vital.

Absence from mainstream classes

While extremely positive themselves about Program F, students noted that some of their teachers did not appreciate their being absent from classes to attend the program. Nor did these teachers believe the students at times when they explained where they had been. They described their teachers as 'crusty about it' and 'pretty angry' and annoyed. In particular, it was reported that a Maths teacher could not see the purpose of the program. It was suggested that the person in charge needed

to write notes about the program to participants' teachers, explaining the reason for each student's absence from class. This would help to dispel teachers' potential anger and/or disbelief. The importance of good communication between agencies and teachers was also highlighted by BAYSA personnel (see p. 90) and the need for clear procedures for such communication emphasised.

Fitting back into school

Asked about how it felt when they had to return to school from the program, one young person in Program F noted how difficult this was. 'It was like you just drop back down again. It was like a curse or something. You just drop and then you come back here and rise again'. Another person described how, on school days, she would have 'sickies all the time'. One student said: 'One of the things the course can't fix is we have all got some sort of reputation either with teachers or other students'. They therefore spoke of the possibility of going to another school to help them succeed and feel that they 'belonged'. Again, the importance of cultural change in schools to become more accepting of such students is highlighted.

Access to alternative programs

Students in Program B (this was a program of voluntary, but limited entry) perceived a few others in the program as disinclined to try to succeed, seeing it as a 'bludge class'. Indeed, resentment against these students was expressed, since other (apparently seen to be more deserving) students were known to wish to join the program but could not be accepted. They thought that, if students were not willing to learn in their alternative program, or were persistently absent, then their place in the program should be re-allocated to others. They noted that this was an expensive program to run and implied that these resources should not be wasted. It was said that a number of students had actually given up and left the program – and the school. A clear recommendation from the students in Program B was that more places in such programs should be made available – for the many 'people out there that need a little bit more help'. They said that many mainstream students were now looking with envy at what was being done in the program and the experiences being provided. One of the students explained it thus:

> *Once my friends heard how much we were learning and how much fun we were having, not only just working hard, we were having fun as well, and all of my friends said 'you are so lucky'.*

This sentiment was confirmed by students in Program G. Of other students, not involved in the program and signalling the importance of making such programs accessible to more students, one person said, 'They think it's unfair ... Why should you have a great class, get out of all that because you run amok? When you run amok, you get benefits'.

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Suitability of work placements

In Program H, one student implied that some employers take advantage of students on work placements, that is, they are not rewarded sufficiently for the work they do. He commented:

> *Sometimes they make you do really laborious stuff and you have to do all this hard work and stuff, and they give you five dollars at the end of the day. The first place I went to, I didn't get paid anything. The school ha ' to pay me because they didn't want to pay me.*

Similarly, another student whose work placement was at a metal storage company did not enjoy the experience. He wants to be an auto electrician. These two examples highlight the importance of *relevant* work placements for students, especially if they are committed to a particular occupation, and of ensuring that the work expected of them is not too onerous or exploitative.

Sufficient time to develop skills

Students in Program G were concerned that they had been unable to complete their projects as they would have wished. While learning some of the difficulties of operating a small business, there was much disappointment expressed that their marketing strategies had not been very successful. 'We went to market and only one thing was sold ... only one wine box ... the market cost us $10 and we sold the wine box for $8'. In relation to these marketing difficulties, they felt that the program had been too short and they had not started early enough.

> *We really should have started at the start of the year, because we haven't had enough time to make our products and sell them. Our boxes, we nearly have our second one done, because they take that long.*

One student said that his team started 'slowish' but that 'things have picked up a bit now because our team is starting to do a bit more'. Another added: 'You need a lot of team effort to get things movin'. Some of us have to do the selling and others have to make the product to sell'. Indeed, one group of students was unanimous in advocating that the program should run for a full year. This would allow adequate time to work out their strategies, learn how to work as a team effectively and make and sell the products. As one person noted '... it takes a lot of time to make and then sell'. Another commented:

> *What I believe happened is the ball can't start rolling at full pace straight off. You need to work out* (what to do) *whereas what we* (are) *doing now is we can breeze along doing everything. When we started we were doing nothing. We are only just getting into it all now.*

Gender issues

In Program H, one of the Year 9 girls thought that the boys do more interesting activities: 'The guys get to do all the stuff that we planned and we have to do paper work and we don't get to go out. The first time we went to the city ... but

we don't do other stuff', and 'They are allowed to go to ... and we are not even allowed to go. We didn't even get the opportunity'. In response to one of the boys saying that 'the only thing that we are doing that is different is that we are building plant boxes', she added:

> *The girls don't do anything like that in Year 9. All they do is watch Big Ears which is fifty years old and stuff. We don't do any activities. ... All the boys do things and we get to do nothing.*

This student has taken action to improve the situation by speaking to her teacher, who indicated an intention to plan more activities such as visits to the city and the movies. There was agreement between the boys and girls about having access to the same activities, for example, go-carting. There was some uncertainty, however, about whether the groups should be mixed, that is, having combined classes of boys and girls. The major issues concerned equal opportunity and stereotyping of 'boys' and 'girls' activities. There was also a suggestion that the type of activities offered depended on what the teacher was or was not prepared to offer: '... they have got Miss (name) and she is like, funky. We have got Miss (name) and she is boring. We play games that you would probably play in pre-school'.

FUTURE STUDENT DIRECTIONS

Overall, it appeared that alternative programs had given students clearer directions for the future. In Programs A and B, most students interviewed intended to stay on in school. In Program C, most said that they would not be at school the following year but seemed to have decided on a course of further training. A number said that they wanted to undertake a TAFE course next year ('I want to be a panel beater and I don't need Years 11 and 12'), and an apprenticeship in carpentry and a fitting and turning course were also mentioned. One young person wanted to continue to VCE, while another explained that he now wants to undertake a commerce degree at university. His work experience at the Credit Union had helped considerably and, through the program, he had acquired the confidence to undertake a degree. While some were still unsure of what they would do ('I don't know whether I'm coming back to school yet. I might have a dairy farm apprenticeship'), one person said it 'lets you go over what you want to do'. Others commented: 'I didn't know what I was doing last year. I'm in a better position this year' and it's 'given me a wider range to look at'. One student remarked that he would leave though if he got 'really sick of school'.

In Program D, most students were reluctant to talk about the future but one person did say that he was considering being an electrician or a landscape gardener. Concerning Program G, one person said that it had given them 'plenty of ideas for the future'. Mostly, they wanted to get apprenticeships (or a 'woodwork job'), or if that were not possible, to stay on in school. Thus, 'it gives you a direction of where you want to go'. Similarly, in Program H, for one student, the program had given him a sense of purpose in staying on at school. He had realised the importance

of continuing: '(I'm staying) at school a bit longer (to complete Year 12) because I worked in a mechanics yard and they're not very educated'. The program had also opened up options of future work for others:

> *It's given me an idea to do a chef's apprenticeship at the end of Year 10.*
>
> *I have got three or four options. One is to try and get into the Army. Another one if I can't get into that, is to do Year 11 or go to TAFE and do a chef course. If I can't do that* (I'll) *go to work with my uncle – do an apprenticeship with him.*

In Program I, many students commented that the program was helping them stay at school and gain a broader view of work opportunities. This ranged from one student learning that he did not want to be a removalist to another who was convinced that the only way to secure a good job was to go to university: 'It's kind of hard. The kinds of jobs that you get aren't good enough if you have got a family. If you go to university you get a better paid job'. He added that these insights were not just attributable to the work placement, but: '... kind of everything that I am doing on a Thursday ... everyone that comes and talks to us ... just made me think'. All students were convinced that it is better to stay on at school until they could secure a job in which they had a genuine interest and not just take any job. This might mean staying until they completed Year 12. One student explained: 'The job is not going to be there forever, and you probably get fired and if you quit you might not get a better job. I would stay at school'. Most students indicated that finishing Year 12 was a goal that was important to them, although one student did say that if a building job came along he would leave school since 'That is what I have always wanted to do'.

At BAYSA some students had no definite plans but explained that they might be clearer later on in the year. One said 'I'm just focusing on this year and then, hopefully, into Year 11 next year'. Another pointed out that, 'You do get a lot of pressure leading up to exams ... and options become cloudy'. One young person was hoping to go to University, however, and had already chosen a particular field, having been given career advice at BAYSA. Others intended to keep going into Years 9 and 10. One student wanted a break from study though, while still keeping his educational options open. 'I'll probably go round Australia for a while, I reckon. Do a bit of fruit picking and that, earn some money and just cruise around and enjoy life while I'm young, and then think about that other stuff later on'.

4 PROGRAMS FOR SUCCESSFUL LEARNING: A COMMUNITY APPROACH

The major strategies and influencing factors for improving school retention rates, identified by respondents to the preliminary questionnaire, were provision of more appropriate curriculum programs, better support structures, and wider options. Other listed strategies were better counselling services, a vocational/work placement emphasis, better external links, a stronger welfare emphasis, better teaching/learning approaches, and the development of mentoring and teacher-student relationships. Stronger parental involvement, experiencing success, belonging to the school, and financial assistance, were also mentioned. Throughout, the importance of links between the school and other agencies and organisations was emphasised, the nature of these links being described in this chapter. (For a glossary of program acronyms, see Appendix 9). A VET Coordinator wrote:

> *Schools can provide regular and sustained support for these young people* (through) *referrals from school to alternative educational settings such as JPP, JPET, Future connections, CONNECT Program, TAFE courses, vocational education courses, pre-apprenticeships, VCE management and transition course* (and) *Centrelink, social workers and youth support agencies.*

SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY LINKS

There is a positive trend in the development of community agency and service support for young people. Fifty-four percent of respondents to the second questionnaire reported that this area was 'developing well' and a further 12% reported 'significant achievement' in their Program Areas. In general, respondents from provincial schools were more confident that network development had been significantly achieved than those from metropolitan or rural settings (see p. 41), with respondents from the Bendigo region being substantially more confident about network development than others. A possible explanation is, as one person reported, that provincial schools have been able to formalise their links with key community agencies. At the other end of the spectrum, 23% reported 'early stages of development'. Only one person, however, reported 'no development' and two respondents reported 'Don't know/NA'.

Many respondents who reported that agency and service support had been 'significantly achieved' (particularly from Bendigo, Casey/Dandenong and Greater

Geelong) listed comprehensive groups of important services that covered employment (e.g. Centrelink, JPP, JPET, Job Network), vocational training (e.g. TAFE Institutes, group training companies, employers, VET cluster programs), youth support (e.g. welfare agencies, local councils), and health (e.g. community health centres). Some included Adult and Community Education (ACE) centres, parental support, legal aid and service clubs (e.g. Rotary). In three cases, agency and service support were clustered around small groups of schools (3-5). This focus had enabled close relationships to develop between agencies and schools and was regarded by respondents as highly effective. These responses contrasted with those where only 'early stages of development' were reported. In this group, the range of services and agencies was much narrower, mostly focusing on employment and training with some youth support.

There appears to be considerable enthusiasm for developing links between schools and agencies. However, one respondent was cautious:

> *... there is a need to ensure that these agencies don't just take on clients because it means money for them – concern that once the program has finished (money has run out) the young people find themselves in similar situations.*

Types of collaborative arrangements

Respondents reported that *new* links made as a result of FSS Program funding were 'developing well' (54%) and another 20% reported that new links had been 'significantly achieved'. Overall, more development appears to have occurred in the metropolitan networks (71% reported 'developing well', 3.6% reported 'significantly achieved) than country areas, perhaps because more progress was required in metropolitan areas (see previous section). Again, principals were more confident that new links had been made than FSS coordinators. In general, the kinds of new links created were in the areas of:

- Employment or pre-employment and work skills programs, for example, from JPP, Centrelink, Group Training Companies, employers, the local TAFE Institute, JPET, the CONNECT Program run through Rotary Clubs in Bendigo to provide work skills in building, and the Department of Natural Resources.
- Information, for example, the Resource Guide for Job Seekers, provided by the local Shire Council.
- Youth Support Services, with youth workers running activities in lunch times at local schools or off-site, including literacy or anger management programs and adventure camps, for example, as run by the local Shire Council or agencies such as BAYSA in the Geelong area and the YMCA.
- Certificate courses, for example, in driver education, sailing, music, beauty care, hospitality, retailing and building and construction, provided at local TAFE Institutes, community learning centres (the ACE sector), for example, the CGEA or the Red Cross for First Aid Training.
- Family care and liaison and other assistance to students in need (in relation to housing, managing budgets, provision of food and clothing etc.), for

example, from non-government organisations such as the Salvation Army.

- Counselling and medical services (AIDs and drug and alcohol counselling; legal and financial advice that sometimes comes into the school, provided by hospitals, local health services, local psychologists and police).

Links with other schools and the local university, particularly relating to teacher education and student mentoring by teachers-in-training, were also mentioned. Thus, while large numbers of agencies have been involved with schools for some time, as McIntyre et al. (1999) also reported for New South Wales, the Full Service Schools Program initiative has increased the dimensions of this involvement considerably. Agencies that are prepared to link and work together, customising what they do for each 'client' appeared to be most valued. It is clear from the many positive comments elicited by the second questionnaire, that the development and enhancement of links between the schools and the supporting agencies have been key influences on the success of the programs within the schools. Typical comments were:

> *Development of a Network Community approach to solving problems. Brought the community to the school.* (Bendigo)
>
> *The existence of agencies such as JPP/JPET who have expertise in linking 'at risk' youths into training/employment.* (Brimbank/Hume)
>
> *Participation of community organisations such as REACH and Crossroads have taken the pressure off staff to provide programs. Good for students to be exposed to a range of people.* (Darebin/Moreland)
>
> *Collaborative relationships with community organisations; involvement of youth workers; support of employers and local organisations providing activity and work placement.* (Darebin/Moreland)

A number of respondents identified the opportunity for students to participate in out-of-school activities at TAFE or in work placements as significant influences on the effectiveness of the programs in engaging potential early leavers. Comments included:

> *Opportunities offered by local TAFE for taster programs ... Employer contributions through work experience – willingness of job providers to provide assistance.* (Brimbank/Hume)
>
> *Great to take students out of the school to a more 'adult' venue and with some anonymity join a group of students from other schools and work with interested providers.* (Ballarat)
>
> *Students have enjoyed the opportunity to participate in 'outsourced' courses at the local TAFE, defensive driving school and leisure centre. Confidence has improved; students no longer feel that they aren't clever enough to do further education.* (East Gippsland/Latrobe/Wellington)

Specifically, the arrangements cited as being in place through links with schools are listed on the next page.

- TAFE (for example, VET courses; information to early school leavers).
- TAFE with any one of the following: JPP; ACE/YMCA (for example, students attend one day per week for one term); Group Training Company (for example, work readiness skills, promotion of job vacancies); university/consortium of schools; university/Group Training Company (for example, literacy and numeracy); community health service (for example, First Aid); senior secondary college; employment agency/ACE (for example, Certificate of Work Education); and employment agency (for example, work readiness programs including students with disabilities).
- Programs for potential early school leavers run either collaboratively by neighbouring schools or offered to neighbouring schools, for example, parenting programs, special projects such as drama productions, camps, adventure programs, specific youth support programs such as counselling, exchange of ideas through visits to other schools.
- Neighbouring schools with a group training company or university/TAFE (for example, shared programs).
- University (trainee teachers)/social workers.
- Youth support agencies and groups.
- VET cluster/employment development agency/JPP for coordination, work placements, apprenticeships and traineeships, literacy and numeracy programs.

TAFE institutes generally provide certificate courses and work education programs. For example, one particularly successful program described is OWE (Options for Work and Education) at Kangan Batman TAFE. This program enables students to complete modules in interest areas such as engineering, electronics, audio, textiles, sports and recreation. School/TAFE, school/agency and school/school collaboration is clearly common.

Some respondents to the second questionnaire, however, reported school/school collaboration varying from links on paper 'but in reality not much' and regular meetings of principals, to availability of programs at other schools and, in some cases, joint delivery of programs. Collaboration appeared to be particularly strong in two networks – Casey/Dandenong and Greater Geelong. Some examples of initiatives in these networks are:

- four schools working together using FSS money to employ a person from a youth support agency to organise and deliver a range of programs (Casey/Dandenong);
- student welfare coordinators from two schools working together to design and run a parenting program (Casey/Dandenong);
- a district protocol to give students at risk of expulsion a fresh start at a neighbouring school (Greater Geelong); and
- shared campus options between five secondary schools, a TAFE institute and a youth support/employment agency (Greater Geelong).

In another network, Frankston/Peninsula, six schools are working together to focus on the particular issue of disengaged boys.

Enabling the formation of collaborative arrangements

A number of points emerged from the second questionnaire in relation to making school-agency links work. A very high proportion of respondents who reported 'significant development' in achieving new links were from provincial networks and only one mentioned funding as an enabling factor (see p. 41). Their responses indicated that what is important is a shared community commitment and sense of responsibility to address the issue of 'youth at risk'. One country respondent used the term 'city response' for the way they operate. This involves: 'networking in the local area'; 'willingness/keenness to be part of a cooperative community support group to deal with at risk kids'; 'cooperation between principals in (the) district'; 'principal support'; 'cooperative district procedure'; and 'being referred from one agency to a more appropriate one'. One country respondent, however, added that such cooperation takes time to develop – in this particular case, it was the result of 'four years of involvement'.

One of the respondents from Casey/Dandenong stated that 'the program was in place in theory (and that) the FSS Program funding made all aspects possible', that is, employing a skilled person with good negotiation skills and well-developed networks to organise and deliver the program. All respondents from this network commented on the key role that funding played. Another common theme was the importance of establishing common goals and the willingness to share ideas and procedures to achieve them. One respondent also stressed the dimensions of 'flexible staff, supportive administration, creative vision and calculated risk-taking'.

Collaboration in the Greater Geelong network (see also pp. 80–82) has evolved over the last four years and has focused on joint course writing and tender writing for funding. Respondents reported that conditions that made this collective brokering possible (Wenger, 1998), were:

- a realisation that students' needs for alternative programs were common to all five schools;
- close geographic proximity which helped to facilitate meetings;
- well established district protocols for student support, for example, a steering committee for the youth support program that is representative of all participating schools;
- active support from principals;
- funding to provide 'the staff to coordinate, facilitate and make it "happen"'; and
- willingness of the local TAFE institute 'to share and work collaboratively'.

Other respondents who reported school/school collaboration also indicated that what drove their efforts was the awareness, desire or need to address the issue of students not succeeding at school more effectively (see p. 41). One country respondent reported that what facilitated action was: 'The awareness that we needed to establish effective networks to achieve resources to service the needs of our students'. This respondent said that supportive leadership from principals was also important. Another respondent from the same region provided an example: 'I approached the principals of the other four schools and negotiated with a facilitator/organiser'.

At the operational level, a network coordinator or allocation of time to school staff enabled students to be case managed and referred to alternative providers. Successful links relied on funding to provide time to set them up and the willingness of other providers to be involved. In some cases, local VET clusters served as a central point for making appropriate contacts. However, for some country schools, collaboration is difficult due to isolation: '... the travel factor excludes us from collaborating in any meaningful way with other schools'. Small numbers also present problems in collaborating with some TAFE institutes and group training companies: 'Both agencies don't have sufficient flexibility to work with small numbers'.

Characteristics of successful networks

Area Network Committee focus group meetings emphasised regular communication between members to assist school-community links, together with employing a designated person in the school to make and maintain them (see following section). This is hard work and personal contact is very important. Usually curriculum needs for students at risk were seen to relate to VET programs (with work placements as a central focus) and literacy and numeracy programs, with the widening of learning beyond the classroom being seen as very important. These needs appeared more easily identifiable than welfare needs. It was said, however, that funding for some TAFE programs is often difficult to obtain. Other ways of making the links work included:

- taking students out of school as a block activity rather than having traditional timetabling (see also pp. 117–118);
- building on some of the links and networks already created;
- regular reporting from agencies to the coordinator in the schools and vice-versa; and
- students knowing that there is a 'regular connection' between the agency and the schools and teachers, that is, people 'haven't had to chase those reports' and people who are facilitating in the agency also know that people in the school are interested in what is happening on that day – it is not an isolated program; the importance of this is testified to by student comments about negative responses to their absence from classes while attending alternative programs (see pp. 74–75).

Respondents to the second questionnaire who reported that development was progressing well also indicated that certain conditions underpinned successful community linkages and the development of a learning community among the parties involved. These included:

- willingness of key players to share ideas and procedures and invite other groups to contribute to program designs;
- joint goals (for the 'common good');
- shared vision and philosophy about the value of programs;
- communication, for example, 'knowing the people and understanding each position and interest';

- staff keenness to see students extended; and
- a coordinator with drive, skill and persistence.

Although much of the drive for links came from the schools, the provision of funding to other agencies and programs such as JPP and JPET means that, at times, schools themselves are being approached to form partnerships. For example, one country respondent explained:

> *Both agencies approached me for clients because they knew the nature of the alternative program and the type of students' needs.*

Another country respondent in East Gippsland reported that, although no new links had been made, the partnerships that were in place were the result of 'hard work by our careers/VET cluster over 10 years'. A respondent from the same region added that they had 'used existing services in more varied ways'.

People to create and maintain the links

Community agencies and services providing welfare support and personal development programs were seen as essential in maintaining potential early leavers in school. Yet, below, a number of difficulties in establishing school-agency links in some areas, and solutions to these difficulties, are outlined.

Difficulties in creating and maintaining the links

Particularly in metropolitan regions, many difficulties were reported by the Area Network Committee focus groups. These included:

- the large number of available agencies but lack of information about them in schools;
- the unavailability of directories of services (although the Moreland City Council was, at this time, about to produce one);
- the extremely time-consuming nature of negotiating the links (a difficulty felt particularly in small schools); and
- from an agency/council perspective, not knowing whom to contact within schools to provide information about programs and services.

It was noted that assistance from an agency is often needed urgently by a school and obtaining relevant advice may be 'the luck of the draw'. As one committee member commented, echoing the NCVER report (see pp. 36–37):

> *It's like there are parallel organisations working with young people and, especially schools, seem to be in a bit of a hole – there's all these community organisations that exist to help young people at risk but schools actually have to go out and make those links.*

The role of youth workers

Across all regions, the presence of a well-informed person to work regularly within each school, getting to know students and their families, creating ongoing links between the school and particular agencies, and often providing programs within

the school, emerged most strongly in the Area Network Committee focus groups as a major factor in retaining students in school. Thus youth workers, who often act as case managers, literacy support and transition workers, and individual counsellors for students, were thought to be particularly useful in this role. They were said to gain the trust of young people and their families, assess their difficulties and have a very powerful, positive influence in guiding and supporting them, and successfully encouraging them to undertake personal development programs, as well as further study. It was said that most teachers do not have the time or energy to do this work, and that 'This gives kids another connection with the community'. Indeed, this appears to be crucial brokering work (Wenger, 1998) that connects many different people and groups together (see p. 44). One committee member described the difference made by such a person in a particular school as 'just magic', and others noted:

> *That personal relationship is so important for kids at risk. They need to be able to connect to the person.*
>
> *Our kids are extremely at risk. Often they have been out of school for long periods of time. It's the only way we can possibly engage them and connect them in the school – to have more support than teachers are able to give ...* (but) *we haven't been able to get the continuity of outside agencies for long periods of time. The local council will send someone in for a couple of hours to be on site and available, and ... counsellors will come in if we phone them up or they will support in certain classes such as Health or PE classes, but they're not there long enough so that you can grab them when a crisis arises for a young person.* (The FSS Program money has made a difference in this case because) *by employing a youth worker we have been able to re-engage these agencies because there is somebody who has time for kids.*

In this case, the broker is required to form a deeply personal relationship, with at least one of the parties. The comment was also made that when resources dry up, relationships with external agencies slip away unless someone like a youth worker is there to maintain them. Continuity of care by one person, someone who is not 'jaded', and often by a small team of teachers (as supported by comments from the student focus groups, see pp. 63–64), was thus considered crucial. Such personnel might also ensure that, when numerous agencies were involved in working with a family, the school was also included in case conferencing and was thus fully informed about student difficulties. Keeping regular contact via e-mail and quick, practical working meetings, say, every two months, was also said to be helpful.

In relation to bringing agency personnel into the school, 'almost mainstreaming them', it was said that this also helps to build students' confidence in making connections with them, that is, 'they've got a face, they've got a name'. It also helps students to negotiate access to the most appropriate agencies. For example:

Many school personnel are unaware of what the various agencies offer and yet, we expect 16 and 17 year olds to navigate their way around them. Personnel from programs such as JPP 'actually take some kids by the hand' and help them find their way.

This was acknowledged as a much more effective method of working with at risk students than operating through school staff. As one person said: 'I've set up appointments for them and organised (the) person and whatever and they still don't get there'. While some students may prefer to go off-campus for advice (see also p. 68), in one area it was said:

So JPP ... I thought was fantastic and I thought our worker ... she's been absolutely marvellous. And there's not a doubt that if you get a good worker who comes to your school regularly and establishes themselves and builds rapport with kids, it's just been excellent.

And, of drug and alcohol counselling that comes into the school, one person said:

A lot of students ... who have been out of school for a period of time or they're at risk of dabbling in some substance use, whether it be hard addictive drugs or milder drugs – it's affecting their schooling somehow. If we're able to identify that and plug them into counsellors who might be involved in the curriculum and then are able to come out in individual cases, that's very helpful. But trying to get the kids to go there, to see counsellors either with the local government or with drug and alcohol services is impossible. I think it is vitally important that it is on site.

Students in one focus group, expressing concerns about the possibility that the funding would be cut for their program the following year, and access to youth workers restricted, discussed the possibility of using peer support as a substitute. As one student said, however, of those trained in peer support: 'they're not as qualified; they don't have the ability to just ring up someone and say "this person's in trouble, can you just be here at ten o'clock"? or whatever. They just don't have the resources'. Another point made was that, with one's peers, confidentiality cannot be assured. 'Once, you know, you've got a secret and you're like itching to tell someone ... whereas these people don't know half of our friends and all that stuff and so it's not exactly like they're going to go and blab something to someone.'

When these students were asked whether youth workers should be involved in school classes, the consensus, however, seemed to be that this was 'pushing it'. 'Cause that's just too much. If you need to talk to these guys, you can just ring 'em (on the mobile) ... you can just ring here and you'll always be able to talk to someone. It's not as if you're going to be stranded and left to deal with it by yourself'. If youth workers helped in the classroom, 'it'd just be the same as speaking to the teacher again. They'd have to employ new people and they'd get that role'. Thus it was seen that having youth workers in school classes would still not assist some students. A story was told about a particular student who was reluctant to ask for help. 'Even though they were at school, (the student) was

avoiding it, like she was dodging them ... if she seen 'em coming, she'd walk the other way and so, if they don't want to help themselves, then you can't help them'. Another person, however, said: 'It's good having them, like, in school. I got approached ... I wasn't too keen at the start ... (but) it's just there and you don't have to go out of your way to find help'.

The role of student welfare coordinators

Many respondents to the second questionnaire identified the important role played by the student welfare coordinators (SWCs), FSS coordinators, and other staff with leadership and specific responsibilities for maintaining the school-agency links. They too have a brokering role. In particular, the SWC's role was seen to be a key factor in the success of many programs. A typical comment was: 'SWC taking the group led to academic progress but also addressing of welfare concerns'. Thus success in one Area Program was enabled by 'Strong working relationships with SWC/school staff' and 'Coordination of referrals by SWC who was also supported by (the) SSSP (Senior Secondary Schools Program) worker'.

A group of SWCs in discussions at BAYSA, mentioned the following points in speaking about their role. Indeed they appeared to have developed, collectively, clear boundary practices to enable the connections between all the groups involved to be maintained smoothly and to be continually monitored. They noted that:

- Their coordination role is emphasised rather than that of 'counselling', since the title 'counsellor' had put students off; they now focus more on coordinating the services offered but their time allocation for working with 'at risk kids' varies considerably from school to school. The emphasis has also moved from 'welfare' to 'wellbeing', emphasising the preventative role of the coordinator.

- They give other teachers help in classroom management (they are concerned with 'staff welfare' too); for example, they might suggest strategies for working with a difficult class, particularly how not to be confrontational. They often use BAYSA personnel to 'bounce ideas off', so that they can say to a teacher: 'I have consulted the people at BAYSA and they agreed that/ suggested that ....'; this apparently gives the SWC credibility with teachers.

- They are very aware of the need to carry the traditional and sceptical teachers with them. One strategy for achieving this was said to be tightening the recording of the movement of 'at risk kids' in and out of school by the use of forms, thus obviating the problems experienced by certain focus group students (see p. 74). Another strategy involved promoting the idea that supporting the programs for at risk students was likely to make teaching easier for teachers – thus stressing the benefits for teachers too. Thus, SWCs recognised that they have an educative role among teaching staff, since all staff need to play a part in helping 'kids at risk'. For example, echoing what certain students in focus groups had reported (see p. 75), some teachers explained that they felt that students who had behaved badly in the school

should not be rewarded by being taken on camps; they didn't understand what the programs were trying to achieve.

- Schools are gradually changing – 'schools have moved as well' – but that, while some teachers are very supportive, some teachers are still opposed. Actually, they commented that support varies among teachers, from encouraging comments to provision of time and resources.
- They help to translate the language of the agencies and social workers for the teachers. They explained that there is a big difference in culture between youth workers and teachers, with students being able to talk to youth workers more easily than to teachers – students see the youth workers as being more approachable. In addition, as noted in a student focus group (see p. 65), cultural difference arises over issues of confidentiality, with youth workers stressing absolute confidentiality and the teachers not seeing confidentiality as so important. Now, youth workers are recognising the need to, at least, inform teachers if a student has a problem, to help the teacher understand the student's behaviour. Thus SWCs are trying to develop a team approach, with youth workers and teachers modifying their practices to accommodate each other.

AGENCY CASE STUDIES

The following three brief case studies illustrate three different kinds of services offered by community agencies.

1. BAYSA in Geelong

BAYSA Youth Services provides a wide range of programs and services for young people thus, as mentioned by Gardner (1990), providing the 'glue' that makes collaboration work. These programs and services include:

- a Community Support Program (CSP) involving intensive case work with young offenders;
- a Local Support Program (LSP) for young people between the ages of 12 and 18, who are at risk of homelessness or who have few personal or practical support structures; and
- JPET, the Commonwealth program that assists young people in accessing suitable education and training or employment.

In particular, two school support programs offered by BAYSA involve youth workers operating in five schools in the Bellarine District to offer assistance and support to young people and their families. These are the MARS (Motivation and Retention of Students) Program and the SSSP (Senior Students Support Project), the latter being directly supported by Full Service Schools Program funding.

The MARS Program is an early intervention program involving case management for 80 young people (Years 7-8) each year with a 75% success rate. The SSSP Program involves more senior students (Years 9-12), and takes 65 students each

year with a 70% school retention rate. Among other activities, in both programs, several youth development and adventure camps are undertaken, involving activities such as rock climbing, mountain bike riding and swimming, and stressing positive risk-taking, personal goal setting and building trust and resilience among the young people involved. Youth workers said that these two programs complement each other, that is:

> *The young people that do go through MARS, they might leave MARS in the first year, 7 or 8, and then they become non-active, but then, in Years 10, 11, 12, they might feel the need for extra support and they can get linked back into that; they know the people who are there; they know what it's all about and they don't feel intimidated by going ahead and saying 'Look, I need some assistance with this or that ...'. And the school knows there's somebody out there that they can link the young person into, that the young person knows them already, that they complement each other.*

Making the programs work

Asked what makes the BAYSA programs 'work', the following 'critical success factors' and their associated boundary practices (Wenger, 1998) were noted:

- *BAYSA's Steering Committee* (including school principals) that sets strategic directions and undertakes constant evaluation so that the services are adjusted as necessary. This committee also has a unifying role, so that joint ownership of responsibility by all parties is established.
- *Links with other agencies* for student referral, for example, in the case of family conflict difficulties, as required, for example, CREATE, BATFORCE. The latter, it was explained, is a peak body which can be contacted to give advice about an appropriate agency for a particular student, since each agency has a somewhat different focus. This contributes to providing options to young people.
- *Good relationships* established between schools and the BAYSA team and the acceptability of its programs in the schools. This has been established through good communication through follow-up phone calls, referral protocols and BAYSA accommodating different protocols and practices in each school in a way satisfactory to all.
- *Whole school support* through visits to schools by the BAYSA team which enable all staff to understand the work being undertaken with the students, and help to develop a common language between teachers and BAYSA team members.
- *Cooperation among personnel* because BAYSA staff are 'user-friendly' and youth workers support the SWCs in the school and the work of case managers.
- *Student choice*, in that students have an informal interview at BAYSA before any formal paper-work is introduced, that is, students say whether or not they wish to continue. Thus they join the programs on a voluntary basis.

Indeed, SWCs tell students to report back to them concerning the suitability of the program and that they can go elsewhere if they wish. The outcomes of this are very positive. If students are not given choices then they can be 'bristling before they even start'. It was noted that it is better to go through all the formal procedures *after* the student has made a choice. 'The more visible we make this (the process of choosing) the better'.

SWCs alone, asked how they would evaluate BAYSA, noted that, once, the BAYSA model had been to have a six week continuous program but, when the students were sent back to school, they were not followed up. This was disruptive to the school and to the students. Now, however, the programs are designed for individual students, according to their needs, involving a whole year program, once a week, once a fortnight, once a month etc. It was recognised that each student is different and that, particularly after intensive counselling, students have to be 'weaned off BAYSA'. It was said that, because students know that the service is available, they feel more secure – since they 'know it's there, they don't need it'. Yet they are happy to visit BAYSA at any time because they know that they are welcome there. SWCs also noted that this is a unique program in Geelong, with the agency and particular schools being closely knit and using each other as sounding boards. No one is protective of their area, unlike the situation within some other agencies.

Student evaluations of BAYSA

Asked about the programs run by BAYSA, students described them as 'excellent', 'fun', and spoke warmly of what they did (for example, in the music program). One said, 'You can see the way it's helping you. It's pretty cool'. However, they suggested that such programs needed to be more widely advertised within the schools. One commented, 'Cause, I didn't even know about it and like I got approached by my teacher ... I'm pretty dead-set sure that there's ... a few kids at school ... (who) have more troubles than me ...'. Others commented, 'There are a lot of young kids that keep their stuff bottled up' and 'Some kids get stressed out and they just don't know how to reason ... so they take it out in different ways'. Another student added, 'It's not just at school; it's like the whole community needs to know'. They also recognised that additional programs would cost money, but when they had suggested a particular activity, this had been followed through and funding was being sought. Describing the advice given at BAYSA, one student said:

Like we're not paying for this sort of stuff ... if you wanted legal advice ... it's going to cost money ... All I have to do is ask (the youth worker), *tell him what I need and, say I need legal help and, straight away, he'll take me to the computer and do that sort of stuff and get it all done and it's not going to cost me anything.*

It was also seen as 'straight advice'. Of the issue of choice, it was also noted that:

He didn't push anything on me at all. You make all the decisions yourself and then you're just shown all the resources he had, and you're like, yeah, I could really get something out of this and I thought, yeah, this could help me, so go for it.

Especially important were the relationships established between students and BAYSA personnel. One student said: 'I don't see these guys as social workers. I see them as friends'. Of the camps conducted over 4 or 5 days, it was noted that you are bound to get to know people well there 'whether you like it or not', and that useful new perspectives are developed by being with different people. The student continued:

> *They're youth workers so they're going to have different views of stuff compared to everyone else that you'd talk to ... and, like, I found when I went to a camp in the Grampians with* (the youth worker), *it was good and that, but, you know, I just totally forgot about home for about 3 or 4 days that I was out there and it was heaps of fun.*

Thus, not only are the camps a setting for establishing trust and positive relationships with adults, a setting rich in social capital, they also provide a distraction from the difficulties of life, providing much needed breathing space.

Asked about seeking help from BAYSA for their friends who were in trouble, one student said: 'It depends on how big the problem is. Like, you know, I've had a few problems with my friend in the past year and she wouldn't (seek help herself); there's no possible way she'd move her arse'. This student had reported the difficulty so BAYSA personnel had approached her. The student continued: 'I know it's lagging or whatever, dobbing on your friends, but if it's a serious problem and they're going to need help ... you're going to tell them'.

2. Bendigo Access

This supports people with disabilities, helping them to gain employment, and provides intensive work skills for the Bendigo Senior Secondary College (BSSC) Transition Program. An Area Network Committee member commented:

> *One of the aspects of the transition program is that students can have one day a week in the workplace and that's been very successful in helping them access apprenticeships, traineeships and ongoing employment. But employers were saying to us the students lack communication skills; they lack basic knowledge of expectations of the workplace. So, we worked with Bendigo Access to tailor-make a program to suit those students, keeping in mind that they were students at risk. They had some learning difficulties, certainly no classified learning disabilities.* (Bendigo Access) *worked with us from Term 1 to enable those students to be work-ready for Terms 2, 3 and 4. And that's been very successful ... we haven't had the difficulties we've had in the past.*

BSSC also funded one of the staff at Bendigo Access to deliver a communications skills program focusing on literacy and managing work requirements. This had succeeded in retaining a number of students in school. It was stressed that, 'Again, we tailor-made the program to focus on the students' needs in the classroom'.

This agency also provides courses such as *Exploring Adult Learning Options* and *Preparation for Employment and Training* for students from the Catholic Regional College, on-campus for Year 9, and off-campus for Year 10. It was said, however, that the off-campus programs tend to work better because:

- alienated, disengaged students get a chance to make a fresh start 'and a chance to build their self-esteem by being a leader – they often won't get that opportunity in the school. We know that; they've got their label', that is, away from school, they get an opportunity to take on more positive roles; and
- students learn to be independent, to know what is available to them in the community and how to 'make their way', in using agencies and in shopping and recreation.

Initially some staff and parents thought that students might be 'negatively labeled' by going into these programs (see also p. 73). However, the programs have attracted more students. For example:

> *... a fascinating thing happened early on in this* (last) *group. A couple of people turned up out of the blue. They shouldn't have done it, but the point was this was seen as an attractive alternative by a couple of other kids who saw that they were or wanted to be a bit different. This was a good signal to the school to identify other students who were 'falling between the cracks' and connect them to these programs and others such as JPP.*

A 7-10 secondary college also uses Bendigo Access to provide pre-employment programs and university mentors, that is, university students are matched up with students based on their interests and they meet once a week, 'just to keep in touch and see how they're going'. One committee member said:

> *I used to have* (a student) *in class and you'd look at his book and it's covered in little graphics and stuff like that. Anyway, he loved meeting this guy from the university who was into the same sort of stuff.*

3. Mt Alexander Youth Program

This intersects with schools to involve students in projects and events in the town, for example, building a skateboard ramp (four students were on the committee that organised the funding and building). An Area Network Committee member commented:

> *... it's had a fairly positive offshoot for those kids. Some of those kids now are in a program called FREEZA ... they got $20,000 to organise concerts ... for young people in Castlemaine.*

A key factor in getting students involved in the program is the youth worker coming into the school and building up relationships with students and staff. It was emphasised, as seen below, that getting the 'right personnel' is a critical success factor:

We've had a very positive young person there who's been prepared to come in to the school, just drop in. (This person is like) *a member of the staff, comes into the classroom, interacts with the kids in their schoolyard and that sort of thing. So that was one really very positive connection.*

... we're working with small groups of kids. We never have more than 16 in any one of the classes and quite often it's less than that on the particular activities they're doing, so it's a pretty close relationship and once they get known these people will walk in the yard and they'll see one of these kids in the yard and they'll walk up and they'll sit down and they'll talk to them at the table. And they'll see them after school. Being a small town it's a big advantage. So the kids are happy to go along ... for example (the youth worker) *will ring up and say I want a couple of kids to be involved in such and such and you go into these kids and say, look do you want to be involved in this? Odds on, you'll get one or two who will say 'yeah, I'll go and have a look at that'. So it's been quite interesting and it's something that a town like Castlemaine hasn't had for a number of years. We've had youth workers there* (before) *but the connectedness hasn't been there.*

TRACKING EARLY LEAVERS

As reported in the preliminary questionnaire, the dominant mechanisms for tracking exit students were exit form records, telephone follow-up and local knowledge through siblings etc., though very few respondents acknowledged having these mechanisms in place. Suggestions for undertaking this task included giving the class teacher responsibility, the use of the Pathways Project (see Footnote 5, p. 46), and community agency links. Yet sixteen respondents to the second questionnaire reported that systems existed or are being planned to follow up exit students. Many recorded destinations of exit students: 'We have records of students' movement for at least a year after leaving'; 'School records; (The school is) in the pilot program tracking students but not Pathways kids specifically'. Other comments included: 'Still working on (this) via our mentoring program we're developing. A five-year program will be put in place to support the target group'; 'One-to-one assistance finds this out' and 'Monitoring students signing out, through coordinators'. It appears that some attention has been given to this issue in the last six months.

Individual school approaches

Area Network Committee members reported that individual schools use a number of different approaches to tracking students (rather similar to the strategies mentioned by Gambone, 1993), some keeping records and/or telephoning the last known contact number, and others using various agencies for follow-up. Although a comment was made that this is something that needs to be done more consciously, one school had had some success in keeping in touch with students because FSS programs had reduced student alienation and built closer relationships with

participating teachers. Although the tracking was not a formal process, it was undertaken because the students kept in contact. The difficulties, however, associated with sometimes enforced family mobility ('and they don't leave a forwarding address') and one-parent families, in which young people alternate between parents living in different regions, were mentioned, particularly in Darebin/Moreland, as making this process very complex and time-consuming.

In responses to the second questionnaire, it was also reported that some schools follow up students with phone calls or home contact. 'Careers teacher makes home contact. Exit form requests information'. 'Phone contact over the following year to check progress – students provided with contact numbers for appropriate support agencies'. 'Coordinators get in touch with student leavers – what they do when they leave is kept on file in the school'. 'Currently conducting telephone surveys at school. VET cluster has also surveyed with our assistance'. 'Phone calls are made/letters sent periodically to school leavers to find out what they are doing. If not working or training, encouraged to return to school'. Small schools in isolated rural settings also reported that they are 'usually aware of what is going on (in the town)' and find that 'the 'grapevine' works well'. One person wrote:

> *Some tracking is incidental and a product of being a small school in a rural-urban centre – students tend to return to visit, siblings pass on information.*

People in the Ballarat Program Area spoke of surveying students, but acknowledged often not finding them. It was mentioned that the 'Pathways Project is looking at this issue' and that 'Schools have never had a brief to do that sort of tracking'. It was mentioned that there may be 'a lot more pressure on us to provide that information, but how to do it ...' was unclear. In Frankston, mentors and the post compulsory network were seen as important here.

In Bendigo, there was consensus that the community did not follow up young people once they had left school. Some schools do destination surveys of Year 12 students and Year 10 students in the 7-10 schools, but these surveys were very general, as illustrated by the following comments:

> *We try to find out what their first movement choice is ... and then we try and do it a second time to see what more or less success* (they are having) *in that. What we haven't done very much on is the students who leave before Year 12.*

> *As part of schools' annual reports, they include a destination guide and that's just a standard section in there. But it's very general so it might put 'Bendigo Senior', 'TAFE', 'seeking employment' – it's just broad categories like that and, beyond working out where they go from the 7-10 school for the next year, ... we don't do any tracking beyond that. We might hear but we don't really record.*

It was pointed out, however, that schools are stretched for resources to undertake this task in terms of both funds and personnel.

It gets difficult. ... because you work with (the transition students) *closely, you do sort of tend to track what happens if they do fall out and ..., I had the time to follow those kids up and make phone calls and whatever. But you do get to the point where you* (think) *I've followed kids even 12 months later and you run out of energy and you run out of options ... and you put your energy and your efforts into keeping the kids you've got at school and while you regret bitterly that you haven't* (followed them up, it isn't possible).

As a school, you don't have the time to do that because your time is probably spent on those kids at school. We just don't have the resources or the time to cater for those that have left school. We just can't do it. And our office admin. students do the hack work of ringing up because that was great that was a real piece of work they could do... it's quite expensive.

There are signs that early school leaving is being seen as a community problem that ought to be addressed collaboratively (Kirby, 2000, p. 21). This approach is reflected in one of the Kirby Report's key recommendations concerning establishing Local Learning and Employment Networks. As one person said:

But I think (there are) *good signs though because what* (the Kirby Report is) *saying is ... here's a problem, and it's not just a school problem. It's a community problem and therefore the community ought to do it together.*

Collaborative approaches

Members of the Bendigo regional network suggested that the Industry and Education Consortium take on the role of tracking former students, since they have represented most of the bodies in Bendigo in the past, including schools, regional DEET, local government, Greater Bendigo Group Training (GBGT) and major industry people. While generally seen as a good thing, concern was expressed about tracking having clear purposes and not becoming a bureaucratic exercise. It was recognised, however, that tracking does provide useful demographic information to the school:

... it does help in shaping the advice because you've got a bit of a picture of what happens in twelve months for most of that (group) *in the school and that certainly sharpens up careers advice and also highlights for students* (the stage of) *transition from school to whatever else.*

I guess it's one thing to track. I guess it's what you're tracking for and why you're tracking. So we can see some benefits in getting some demographic idea of where those kids are going or what they're doing. But it's supposedly there to assist them, I would imagine, and I guess you'd have to be very careful that it just doesn't become a bureaucratic exercise where you put another label or number on these kids so that it's another thing that they have to go to Centrelink for every three months or one month or whatever to report in ... (we have) *just got to be careful.*

An *organisation* focus, rather than a *person* focus, was seen as important because personnel move on and continuity needs to be provided. Thus, in Bendigo, it was suggested that an organisation should be responsible for linking young people to resources as they need them, not only employment and training, but health services as well:

> *... we've looked at that Swedish model where they've followed those kids through until they are 22 or 23. These sorts of kids do need that. They don't need someone breathing down their necks all the time. I'd hate that to become too governmental, too bureaucratic, but they do certainly need someone.*

One suggestion was that the City of Greater Bendigo could occupy that role as it is a stable organisation that 'these kids can come back to'. Another suggestion was to build on the successful JPP program that is in place and provides advocacy in relation to education, training and employment. This could be expanded to connect to health services and other relevant agencies in the region. GBGT has provided a room or resource centre, and the City Council and Rotary have also contributed funds. This input, together with the FSS money, has created 'joint ownership in that the whole thing (involves) a variety of people from organisations within the community'. The value of joint ownership is that it extends the range of funding sources and promotes collaborative community responsibility. As one committee member said:

> *The other thing I like about it is that* (the) *Council gets funding for youth and areas of youth support that we at school aren't aware of, that they can tap into and provide ongoing employment for* (a case worker) in this area. *... Likewise agencies* (such as) *GBGT* (are) *aware of funding within their domain and so we can put an application ... to get more funding through that sort of mechanism. So by having joint ownership ... you're also allowing funding and knowledge and information coming in from a wider group. ... And it is a community ownership thing. I think that's an important thing as well. It's not seen as their problem.*

This joint ownership appears to be a very important aspect of collective brokering, as seen among certain schools and BAYSA in the Geelong region (see p. 90). In Maryborough, FSS money was being used to employ a case worker, who had brought local agencies together to address the 'students at risk' issue and was located away from the school. There is high structural unemployment in Maryborough and the case worker acts as a mediator, assisting young people to make the transition from school or unemployment to further training, or connecting them to other agencies:

> *Some* (students) *had left school but they now have some contact because they see* (the case worker) *as not attached to the school and as someone who could book them into a drama class or TAFE or something else, but also having some links with the school, so there's something there that they feel they've still got.*

The Students At Risk (STAR) program was cited in Casey/Dandenong as another effective means of tracking young people, and involved the worker employed in this program in encouraging young people to return to a school or in assisting them with placement in employment or a training scheme. JPP was also mentioned as having some resources to follow up young people. It was recognised any person designated to undertake this kind of work must have high levels of skill, but that central coordination of this process is very important.

In East Gippsland, liaising with careers teachers, job network providers and TAFEs was emphasised and a suggestion of offering incentives for students to keep in touch was mentioned, for example, free Internet access, perhaps, or a financial incentive. Yet it was thought that particular people must be designated to do this work, with exit forms needing to be sent to tracking agencies. Other methods of follow-up listed in the second questionnaire included: 'Development of data base by Monash University students'; 'Careers coordinator with the aid of STEPS (Program) tracks early school leavers'; 'Networking with TAFE, Group Training to see where kids go; Annual Report of school covers destinations – done as accurately as possible'; and 'Links to Moreland Council Youth Services'.

Although there were many more responses to this question in the 'Don't know/ NA' (9%) and 'No development' (15%) categories than for others in the second questionnaire, there was evidence of much developmental work to put effective tracking procedures in place ('early stages of development' 49%; 'developing well', 23%). Only two respondents, however, felt that an effective tracking system had been 'significantly achieved' and only one of these provided brief details. These focused on links with local youth support and employment agencies: 'Handbrake Turn, Jobs Pathways Programme, CREATE. These agencies liaise with the school (and the) Youth Affairs Department – City of Geelong'.

Another respondent from Greater Geelong reported on further development as part of the Pathways Project launched by DEET in 2000: 'The region is in the process of service mapping and establishing a reloading/tracking system involving DEET and possibly Centrelink'. This Project was cited by 13 respondents as an opportunity to develop an effective system for tracking early school leavers, with some indicating that plans were underway in most regions: 'This is in the early stages with a combined community agency and secondary school network being developed to assist with this process' and 'the Program in the Pathways Project is being established; and the Network has recognised this as a problem and is investigating methods'.

According to the second questionnaire, JPP also continues to play an important role in maintaining contact with early school leavers: 'We give names to JPP but it would be good to have interim resources in place as well'; 'The school arranges interviews with the JPP counsellor if students are considering early leaving'; and 'JPP – have all at risk students on record; have regular contact'. Generally, respondents recognised the need for viable and effective tracking systems. Some respondents, however, noted that viability depended on adequate resources,

personnel and funds: 'We believe we need a project worker to track these students. (There is) clearly a lack of personnel to track early school leavers on a regional basis', and:

> *This is difficult. We are a Year 7-10 college. Several of our at risk students enroll in programs at BSSC* (Bendigo Senior Secondary College) *which can track* (these students). *The others we place in other organisations are not tracked due to time constraints.*

5 SCHOOLS IN TRANSITION: OFFERING A FULL SERVICE

This chapter includes a discussion of various aspects of school change, as required in supporting a 'Full Service' for young people, particularly those who are potential early school leavers.

FLEXIBLE CURRICULUM ARRANGEMENTS

An Area Network Committee member commented:

> *Schools need more flexible curriculum and they need better links with employers and employment agencies. I think that would make a huge difference to school retention.*

The need for more meaningful/relevant programs for students was emphasised, accompanied by more parental involvement. It was said that mainstream curriculum needed to be redesigned to include a diverse range of activities, often focusing on the development of students' skills in literacy and numeracy. It was also seen to be necessary to provide a curriculum that can engage students' interest, for example, through alternative programs involving project work and work placements. In addition, it was noted that it is not necessarily low achievers who profit by such programs and, as Lamb et al. (2000) note, VET and other programs should be seen as having equal status with mainstream schooling.

Indeed, across all regions, the introduction of more flexible and relevant curriculum options was seen to be a significant factor in increasing school retention rates that was welcomed by both staff and students.

> *Staff were very supportive of special programs run and were willing to reinforce attitudes/strategies.*

> *Students feel comfortable, welcome and enjoy being treated as an adult in an adult environment* (senior school Years 11 & 12). *Students are taught curriculum based on their academic ability, interest and needs.*

Those respondents to the second questionnaire who reported a strong sense of achievement in increasing curriculum offerings were very specific in nominating programs that were in place such as those listed previously (see pp. 48–49, 80). Respondents who reported 'early stages of development', on the other hand, placed emphasis on an increased range of options, for example, 'more VET courses', more 'outdoor activities', 'more career advice', 'involving some students in out of school work and experience'. Some respondents also focused on how teachers

were changing in the ways they worked with students. For example, they said: 'Teachers are negotiating assessment tasks with students'; 'Teachers are more flexible in looking at individual student programs'; '(The FSS Program) has highlighted the need for increasing the options for our at risk students'; and '(There is) greater homework support'. In Brimbank/Hume, in which 83% of respondents reported that curriculum offerings were developing well or had been significantly achieved, it was said that an 'effective teaching and learning network' had been established. Another teacher from this region also commented that 'team teaching enables extra assistance with literacy, numeracy, and social problems'.

Some issues that emerged as important, and sometimes problematic, in providing flexible curriculum, are discussed below. These are: integration into the mainstream, an increased vocational focus, program resourcing, providing credit for skills achieved in alternative programs for other areas of the curriculum, and providing for students with very low levels of skill, particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy.

Integration into the mainstream

Some respondents to the second questionnaire referred to attempts to integrate 'at risk' programs into the mainstream. Typical of the comments, indicating some 'critical success factors' for this enterprise, were: '... decision to integrate program into normal subject offerings'; 'willingness to write/design specific detailed integration curriculum for the program'; and 'provision of specialist programs within the mainstream courses. These allowed individual freedom to meet the needs of students without withdrawing (them) from class'.

Yet whether alternative programs should be entirely separate from or link into mainstream programs appeared to be a moot point, with supplemental and fundamental change to the curriculum (Withers and Batten, 1995) being placed in contrast in a number of regions. Certainly, some Area Network Committee members believed that emphasis should be given in schools to providing curriculum that can accommodate the range of skills and learning styles within the whole student cohort. Even if separate programs are offered, it was seen to be important to link such programs back to VCE because of the prestige accompanying a VCE credential. Mixing some VCE mainstream subjects with some studies in alternative programs was thought to be most desirable, or students, they said, run the risk of being marginalised, for example, becoming the 'vegie class' (see also pp. 73–74).

Yet a shorter course than VCE, leading to some kind of certification, was recommended by other people as important for many students. VCE is too long for them, the VCE/VET assessment structure requires students to be very organised to survive, and at risk students often find this difficult. It was thought that a certificate for work placement should also be given. Thus, some form of recognised accreditation for the alternative programs on offer was said to be required. Indeed, more than 77% of respondents to the second questionnaire indicated that students do receive a certificate or award for their involvement in these programs, with a little more than half indicating that the award was presented to the students at a

presentation or local ceremony. Recognition awards ranged from local participation acknowledgement through to accredited VET certificates.

Although some schools reported an increased range of curriculum options in responses to the second questionnaire, they certainly appeared less confident about the extent to which these programs are, or should be, integrated into the mainstream curriculum. Some respondents reported 'no development' or 'don't know' to a question about this issue. However, there were signs that movement is occurring. The majority (38%) indicated that integration is at 'early stages of development'. Responses in this category indicated that there had been some shift in teacher attitudes towards designing the curriculum to be more inclusive, but the emphasis still appeared to be on 'alternative' programs rather than on re-designing mainstream programs. For example, people wrote: '(There are) modified work requirements for students at risk'; '(There is a) separate strand within the curriculum. Learning practices are shared with staff' and 'The positive staff are helping to modify the curriculum'. Another said:

> *It is now accepted that, for some students, full-time participation in mainstream curriculum is not in their (or the school's) best interest. Greater willingness to be flexible.*

Two respondents though did indicate a more mainstream approach:

> *Some teachers provide details of tasks so we can assist and encourage students to complete them.* (There is an) *increasing practice of modifying tasks.*

> *Year 10 students attend electives the same as other students. Frameworks document is being used to develop programs.*

There was not total staff support in these schools, however, as seen in the following comments: 'Everyone has so many demands'; 'Staff are busy … some staff switch off'; and 'Outside of Year 10, not many people are interested in what (FSS) is and how it works. It's about changing attitudes'.

At the other end of the spectrum, though, over half of the respondents (52%) indicated that curriculum integration was 'developing well' (29%) or was 'significantly achieved' (23%). These respondents reported on programs that offered a greater choice among curriculum offerings that had a strong VET or work focus. It was stressed, however, that where this occurs it is important to timetable these programs so students do not miss other classes (see p. 74). These programs also included early identification of students potentially at risk and support structures such as tutoring, study management programs and an increased pastoral role for staff.

Overall, principals (35%) were much more confident that programs for students at risk had been integrated into mainstream curriculum than were the FSS/SW coordinators (15%). Their responses also indicate a strong focus on putting supportive infrastructure in place. For example: 'Two of the above programs are

established in 2000 and funding is being sought for 2001. The format works well'; 'Spreads across two year levels and selected as per normal offerings'; 'Our approaches have deliberately been 'mainstream' at all levels'; '(The FSS Program) is integrated into senior campus curriculum in 2000/2001' and 'Elective program (developed) which will/has assisted with behaviour/academic problems in Year 10 classes'. In addition:

> *Students are selected at beginning of the year ... Parent/student interview ... Part of Year 10 ... Students channelled into Pathways course.*
>
> *Identification processes, reporting and counselling practices have improved; Steering Committee strategies and PD have helped.*
>
> *The Senior Students Support Project is an integral part of five state secondary schools in the Bellarine district ... Student welfare response ... Steering committee established ... Part of another BAYSA (Regional Youth Support) program.*
>
> *Following the cessation of the two year (FSS) funding, the School Council is now funding the position of 'student support', that is the continuation of the program.*
>
> *Our belief is that students at risk are best targeted by targeting the entire cohort. All of our programs do this.*
>
> *The program for at risk students is recognised by all and is timetabled so that no classes are missed. Students are not just withdrawn on an 'ad hoc' basis.*

The Study Management Program is an example that was cited of an integrated 'alternative' program offered within the mainstream curriculum of the VCE.

In the Bendigo region, the Area Network Committee noted that a disadvantage for students undertaking programs run by community agencies is that it disrupts their normal programs. This had led one school to completely revise its Year 10 program into a more flexible vocational pathways format so that students could follow their interests and have their individual needs met. As Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest, different practices surface new dilemmas that often precipitate further change. Instead of being 'add-on' programs, the school has arranged with agencies to deliver them in the school, where possible, as part of the vocational curriculum. In this way the collection of community-based programs were integrated into mainstream curriculum. This also overcomes the problem of monitoring students' attendance in programs delivered outside the school and reported as a problem in one of the student focus groups (see p. 74).

Thus, this group recognised that the region needed to review what was being offered to the full range of students to engage those at risk of leaving school early and to extend options:

I think ... we need to fundamentally look at what we're teaching. I mean in the government sector, we're talking about engagement and then what we're going to do with Years 9 & 10. ... We've got to cater for both and allow crossover. ... The vocational stream ... there's a practical stream there and kids should be allowed to move in and out and have no stigma that says that's the lesser course than the other one. Now we're a long way from that but I think we're starting to look at it seriously.

Suggestions put forward were based on successful strategies that schools had started to implement in the FSS Program. One school was focusing on making the curriculum more practical and fun. This involves utilising the collective personal skills and interests amongst the staff:

Well, one of the things that we can do and some of us are beginning to do is to realise that teachers are quite good in a number of things other than the subjects that they teach. So often times there are a whole lot of practical things that most adults (can do and that) *they can actually introduce to students. So we're beginning to look at that in Years 8 and 9 next year in terms of a recreational program. ... it's also a broader-based learning program that's much more hands on. ... it's supposed to be fun and it's supposed to be practical. So, we're going to get into that next year. We've also got a thing called student enterprise which is set up on an enterprise model where practical, real work projects are undertaken. Now really, in some ways, we'd like to have every student to have a go at this sort of experience and so everyone does it and you can opt for more or less of it. So that's just sort of a standard approach as part of your education and we'll also have that community development aspect to it.*

A comment was made in the Ballarat Area Network Committee focus group, though, to the effect that *different* pathways are needed, together with an *acceptance* of 'kids' being different. It is 'okay', however, if they do go back to mainstream. Yet the importance of making teachers aware that students have been on short programs elsewhere, so that they can show an interest in these programs, was stressed, if this arrangement is to be effective. This involves developing a different kind of culture among the teaching staff. In some schools, though, it was recognised that there is no alternative but to send students back to the mainstream.

An increased vocational focus

In one Area Network Committee focus group particularly, increased acceptance and valuing of vocational and workplace learning in the region was reported: '... it's shifting now to a stage where that sort of thing has become quite acceptable', and:

... we've got some boys that are just about finished their pre-apprenticeship program and likewise, they're looking at employment and some of them have been offered employment. But the feedback that you get from the kids and the (teacher who runs) *the problem-solving* (program in the) *maths*

area is (that it is) *practical and therefore they can see why they're doing it, they can understand why they have to learn about Pythagoras' theory in terms of squaring up a site to lay concrete or whatever. It's more relevant to them because they can see the need for it and that they have to learn it. You know, if you see the need, then you see you have to learn. It's like kids going to get a car licence – they want a car.*

Resourcing of alternative programs

Successful programs require adequate resources but these are only allocated through the support of the whole school community. In one school in which this had occurred, it was reported in the second questionnaire that their program:

> *Became a charter priority. Financial commitment by school to support program; positive attitude to selected teaching staff; parent and community support for program.*

Indeed, many respondents to the second questionnaire, across all regions, identified resourcing – generally linked to funding – as a significant barrier to the effectiveness of their program. This was seen to impact on a number of aspects including: 'Lack of time available for teachers in schools to plan for case management program'; 'The difficulty of fitting programs into the mainstream. Funding of programs'; 'Lack of physical resources to provide a "home base"; lack of student support for literacy programs'; 'Lack of teaching staff numbers to provide the intensive support with personal/educational constraining factors'; 'No SWC, no career teacher, limited range of non-academic subjects'; and 'More funding needed for curriculum; more funding for staffing/time release; very draining emotionally for staff as quite demanding'. Difficulties were also noted in relation to alternative program development in small schools and the capacity to offer alternatives programs.

Respondents identified the major negative influences on the program from outside of the school to be: the instability of the student's personal life, particularly family influences; difficulties in obtaining suitable work placements; the high cost of outsourced programs; organisational and staffing difficulties encountered in some TAFE programs; issues associated with the transportation of students; and a range of issues concerning funding, including its impact on the sustainability of the program.

It was also noted in the Area Network Committee focus groups that programs for students at risk are expensive, because of the additional material resources required for courses that are not in mainstream curriculum, and because of the need for staff to work intensively with small groups or individual students. One person commented:

> *The global budget is worked out per head and if you're spending $4000-5000 on 14 students, that's a fairly major* (slice of the budget) *... and in schools where there is a more significant 'at risk' population ... because*

they don't have a lot of outside support or outside networks (the problem is even greater) ... *we could probably identify 40-50 of our Year 9s and 10s who are at risk in one way or another, but we tend to focus on 15 or 20* (who are most at risk).

A range of resources was reported by respondents to be necessary in relation to school decisions to support students at risk. These included:

- access to community-based youth services working in schools;
- after hours library and computer access;
- outsourced courses and programs;
- study hall and lap-top computers;
- a designated classroom and designated staff;
- assistance with accommodation and legal issues; and
- casual relief teachers (CRTs) to run programs.

It was also noted that providing flexible arrangements in relatively isolated country towns where there is only one school is difficult.

Providing credit for students

In line with recommendations by the ACCI (see p. 38), one school in Bendigo reported in the Area Network Committee focus group that it was building the concept of 'negotiating credit' into an enterprise program that counted towards student's assessment:

> ... *you've got a project where you build a hot house and you've ordered the materials and worked out where you're going to cut and join the posts together and so forth and so on. There's quite a deal of reasonably complicated Maths for Year 9 students.*

In this particular instance, one student involved had done very little Maths before yet, in the context of the program, he 'did it willingly'.

> *And the teacher ... then said, 'OK, this is what this student has done, can* (he) *be given credit for the Year 9 Maths?' ... and it was. So it's the circumstances where learning takes place and how credit can be given. It's also about recognising all forms of writing including tenders and letters asking for sponsorship, asking for business ... all that being taken into account. Once you've got those things running, and they're not that hard to do, you just need someone who's got the drive and push to* (implement it across the school).

It was noted that key competencies and competency-based assessment have 'given teachers a bit of a tool' to work in this way and most of the Bendigo schools were using these to some degree, especially in Years 9 and 10.

Providing for students with low skill levels

Overall, much concern was expressed about low levels of literacy and numeracy, since these are seen to be the foundations both of success at school and

employability. Low skills levels also seem to be associated with low self-esteem and self-worth. Respondents to the second questionnaire were therefore keen to address this problem. There was a general view that this requires teachers and other personnel to work with small groups or teams of students, and undertake case management. Whether schools organise these programs in-house, or purchase services, they certainly require additional funds. There are also other costs, for example, for TAFE training, camps and adventure activities and materials for hands-on projects and activities. Funding such programs and activities presents a major issue to be addressed at both local and systems levels.

Most respondents to the second questionnaire focused on ways to improve young people's employability. Only three respondents commented on the lack of available jobs for young people who have low skill and education levels. One of these respondents commented: 'There is a sub-group who doesn't have skills. An outreach centre with high level and personal contact needs to exist'. Another respondent from the same region called for adequate funding to enable/encourage schools to develop flexible arrangements going beyond the traditional school curriculum. This reflects a view, also reported by others (see p. 101), that current curriculum frameworks, that is, the Curriculum and Standards Framework for VCE and TAFE, is too academic and not sufficiently flexible to cater for groups with low skill and education levels in relevant and meaningful ways. For example: 'The CSF is too narrow and mainstream. All students are not high school type students'. One of these respondents added:

> *Regardless of what we offer, by the time the students attempt VCE it is too late for them to address their literacy and numeracy issues. Programs such as Pre- VCE etc. are important – hands on experience and moving away from VCE as it is now. Even VET is becoming too academic.*

Another respondent indicated that diagnostic testing (by ACER) of students' skill levels had enabled 'more appropriate class work (to) be presented and, in some cases, further testing and special assistance to be organised'. This person, however, also stressed that there were 'not enough resources to do this for all needy cases'.

Many respondents suggested that interventions to increase young people's employability needed to be put in place much earlier in their schooling. Having had some success in re-engaging students in Years 9-12, many now want to extend their programs to Years 7 and 8. One person went even further, suggesting:

> *They should start at primary school. The path to leaving school early begins around Grade 3 or 4 and is easily recognisable mid-way through Year 7.*

Another person from the same region agreed that Year 7 would be an appropriate starting point. Philosophically, this reflected 'a genuine belief and commitment to a more equal rather than a more stratified society'.

In the Area Network Committee focus groups, while literacy was seen as a problem that needs to be addressed – a challenge for schools and their communities – it was said that literacy programs need to be offered in a way that is attractive and

relevant to young people with poor skills: 'So, it has to be in a non-threatening environment' and 'If they're called literacy skills, the program itself doesn't seem to hold them'. One person noted that literacy and numeracy could be developed for many young people by, for example, 'building engines'. Others commented:

> *I agree that literacy* (needs to be) *addressed but the problems we have with that is the readiness of kids to be involved in* (programs). *...Creative ways in which kids would want to act with that sort of support would* (help), *but just the provision itself hasn't* (been) *that successful for us. But there are kids with very poor skills at that senior level.*
>
> *If I need to be able to follow my employer's instructions or my supervisor's instructions which are written down, then I need to read. I need this ... so it becomes a need, but they have to be encouraged along that path because you know, some of these kids would just get frustrated by that and tear it* (a written task) *up and walk away.*

It was said that, with low self-esteem, students with poor literacy skills are often reluctant to seek help. A strong theme emerged that, if you call a program 'literacy', the students will not turn up. If you call it something else, that is associated with training or work, but which has a literacy component, at risk students are more interested in engaging in literacy because they see the relevance, a need or 'pay-off' for doing so.

Describing a literacy program in one region, it was said that a program of one day per week is not enough. A trial program was described which was more intensive, with small class groups going back to basics. Students were helped to identify their skills, weaknesses and strengths and how to develop further. They had the opportunity for one-to-one work with a group meeting at the same time each day, for twenty consecutive days, to reiterate the ground rules and have daily repetition. This made a huge difference to students' school work and to their performance in part-time jobs.

For example, in stacking shelves, they could read what was in the boxes, instead of having to unpack them first to see what was in them. In fact, going over what they had done the day before, and what they had missed previously, helped them to 'come on by leaps and bounds'. They 'weren't frustrated' any more and could read for the first time. But it was recognised that, where reading skills are poorer, students may need a slower pace and fail to develop as quickly. Programs have to be adapted for need and a particular program may not work for everyone. Others noted that teachers should provide students with realistic goals so that students can experience success.

Yet, in spite of much progress in this area, developing literacy and numeracy skills was said to be a major challenge for schools – where some students have failed repeatedly and whose lack of skill has never been properly addressed. It was acknowledged that most teachers do not have the specialist knowledge required to assist students with very low levels of skill, that competing demands of teaching

duties leave little space to fit this in, with large classes making intensive work with individual students impossible. This problem is amplified by the increasingly ageing teaching staff in some schools who, it was said, no longer have the energy for continuing 'the battle'. It was thought that this, particularly, is an area in which youth workers can assist. It has also been demonstrated (Bradshaw et al., 2001) that partnerships between ACE and schools can lead to literacy programs which benefit at risk young people.

SELECTING TEACHERS FOR ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS

The second questionnaire data indicated the importance of the selection of teachers for alternative programs who possessed qualities such as those recommended by Ward et al. (1998) and Gambone (1993) (see p. 32). These have to be people who are sensitive to the needs of the target group and are prepared to work collaboratively with colleagues, administration and agency personnel to explore ways of accommodating at risk students. Typical comments from different regions indicated the importance of: 'Keen staff involved directly with the program' and '... enthusiasm of staff involved in the design of (the) program'.

In cases where respondents believed that teacher effectiveness in working with students at risk had been significantly achieved, the strongest dimensions contributing to this appeared to be teacher-student relationships and close links with outside agencies. Comments made included: 'Teachers in the course have good personal relationship skills and priority to helping kids. Unsuitable teachers were replaced'; 'Far greater communication between students, FSS staff member and teaching staff'; 'Relationships improved, priority meetings held, closer liaison with outside agencies'; and 'Enhanced ability to address at risk factors through liaison with youth worker, SWC and JPP/JPET personnel'.

From the Area Network Committee focus groups is was also noted that teachers in alternative programs need to work with students on the basis of mutual respect and empathy, rather than power, and provide continuity and personal attention.

The point was made that teachers who work with students at risk need to know what these students are like and volunteer for these programs. Consistent with many of the comments from the student focus groups and the literature on social connectedness, it was said that they should be people who can relate to and communicate well with these students, gain their trust and adopt a range of strategies in working with them, providing a sense of belonging and an adult learning environment.

It was recognised that the work of these teachers is highly stressful, given changes both in the teachers' role and parents' expectations, and the increasing numbers of dysfunctional students as a result of social and family circumstances. In responses to the second questionnaire, it was also noted that although there is 'growing

understanding' of the special needs of at risk students, and acknowledgement that 'teachers will modify work', there is some concern that 'for those working with (these) groups of students, there is an element of teacher burnout'. One suggestion was that 'smaller class sizes and an extended period of time to do the work is helpful' (see also p. 118 on Structural Change and p. 63 for student perspectives on this issue).

ENGAGING PARENTAL SUPPORT

A number of respondents to the second questionnaire suggested that improved family relationships were a consequence of students' participation in their program and were thus a contributing factor in its ongoing effectiveness. Comments included: 'At school, not on street; improved family relationship'; 'Increased self-esteem has reduced some conflict in family situations'; 'Parents saw a positive direction for the programs. They have been fighting with their children to stay at school'; and 'These programs are well received by parents'. In Area Network Committee focus groups also, it was widely thought that the involvement and commitment of parents should be sought for alternative programs. Members reported that general information evenings were sometimes held, as well as selected parent-teacher interviews, and that these were crucial for the success of the programs.

These perceptions are also supported by comments from the student focus groups. For example, parents were said to be supportive of many of the programs (see p. 62), with tangible forms of parental support, such as helping with homework or driving the young people to work placements, being mentioned. Those parents who had initially been sceptical had also, frequently, been persuaded to become supportive by witnessing their children's achievements. For example, in Program H, one student commented:

> *My dad didn't have a lot of faith in the program, but now he thinks it's great that my marks are up ... going out in the workforce on a Wednesday and doing different jobs.*

CULTURAL CHANGE

In the Bendigo Area Network Committee focus group, it was said that change in school culture implies a moral and educational shift towards really examining student needs and putting in place a more inclusive curriculum that truly meets these needs:

> *We can't force all students through a traditional Year 10 program because it just doesn't suit.... You know, what is a real Year 10?*
>
> (If a program runs) *only for a term or kids can only have one go at that, just trying to keep some continuity and keep things going throughout the whole*

year (is) *ridiculous. I mean, if you've identified them as at risk and that's the whole problem ... they really need to be supported through their final year of education fully. And helped into something beyond.*

Indeed, it was seen in all Program Areas that policies dealing with potential early leavers needed to address cultural change within the school. Mentoring of teachers was thought to be required and schools committed to whole-school programs. Yet, difficulties were noted in relation to alternative program development in some regions in that some principals do not wish their school to be labelled a 'welfare school', when an academic program is more likely to be attractive to students and their parents. One teacher expressed concern that there are many schools in a particular Program Area who 'have washed their hands of these kids' because they see themselves as 'academic' and are therefore selective in the students they recruit. She added: 'The VCE is not very at risk student-friendly'.

It was noted that increased competition has led schools to being very concerned about pass rates and grades. The ENTER score that is now applied to VET programs is excluding many at risk students because organisation, commitment and motivation are required to be successful. Indeed, it was said that the culture of many schools (and that of the community generally) is one that has little respect for vocational skills and trades (as noted by Ryan, 1997), and thus support for alternative programs is often tenuous. It was suggested that the media could be used to promote constructive cultural change. Some students also have unrealistic expectations about the two year VCE and proceeding to university, particularly if they have poor literacy levels, but they often refuse to consider other options because of cultural attitudes (see also p. 73).

In East Gippsland/Latrobe/Wellington, it was also said that the emphasis needed to shift from tertiary entrance and ENTER scores as the process that drives VCE and curriculum, to examining the way teaching and learning occurs. Schools needed to focus on delivery of information through more hands-on, practical learning and simulated real-life, work settings. More time was also needed for specialised school staff to connect with students at school.

Below, some dimensions of cultural change in schools are discussed, including teachers attitudes and professional development, together with whole-school approaches to discipline, welfare and alternative program development.

Teacher attitudes

Many respondents to the second questionnaire nominated the support of other staff as a factor contributing to the success of a program, as indicated in the following statements: '... cooperation from teaching staff in modifying tasks to accommodate students'; 'Encouraged other teachers to explore more flexible teaching – closer relationships with students'; 'Willingness of staff to be part of program and to undertake or modify progress within their teaching area' and 'Willingness of teachers to accept a different approach to education and to adapt

to different needs of students'. Indeed, a number of respondents identified the resistance of teachers not involved directly in a program as a major negative influence on its effectiveness. Comments included: 'Inability to be flexible – especially individual teachers'; 'Elite attitudes by some teachers'; 'Some teachers would not feel the program was part of "real" school' and 'Some resistance by a few staff who have no time for them (students at risk)'. As Bradley (1992) also reported from Queensland, some teachers believe that an improvement in school retention rates is not a desirable outcome.

In the Darebin/Moreland Area Network Committee focus group, it was recognised that there can be a mismatch between high school oriented teachers and at risk students. In one school, students were given assistance in preparing for their return to the mainstream program since it was felt that they had unrealistic expectations about how mainstream teachers should act. They were warned that they would have to write and keep quiet for an extended period of time. In this way, many very difficult students had been assisted in undertaking VCE in one school. In another school, the alternative program coordinator acted as an advocate and mediator for at risk students, helping them to explain themselves to mainstream teachers.

With respect to teaching at risk students by mainstream teachers, it was said that there appear to be two categories of teachers:

(i) those that are unwilling or unable to move away from mainstream curriculum; and

(ii) those who are very committed to accommodating these students, through taking flexible approaches to curriculum and building respectful relationships that encourage students to keep in contact.

Below, the extent of the difficulties, and some of the influences on teacher attitudes, are outlined.

How much have attitudes changed?

It was thought that the FSS Program had had an effect on teachers' awareness of the need to be more flexible to cater for students at risk. Only a very small number of respondents to the second questionnaire (4%) believed that there was no significant development in this area or did not know. Most reported that teacher effectiveness was either 'developing well' (41%) or was in 'early stages of development' (41%). A small number (12%) believed that teachers had 'significantly achieved' working effectively with students at risk. Principals were also slightly more confident of a shift in teacher effectiveness than FSS/SW coordinators. Those who reported 'early stages of development' focused on the difficulties associated with increasing teachers' awareness, commitment and ability to work with these students.

It was seen that the FSS Program had helped in raising teachers' awareness that current schooling is not engaging a significant proportion of young people. Changes

were 'happening in some areas', for example: 'Greater homework awareness; greater use of pathways information'; 'Working on individual programs, allowing students to choose work tasks appropriate to their abilities'; 'Year 10 Worklinks group has teachers that understand that some curriculum may need to be modified' and 'The willingness of staff to seek advice and assistance on dealing with these students is a very positive sign'. One person commented on the trend to making academic subjects more applied:

> *Willingness to modify tasks/develop curriculum with more 'real world' application, e.g. Consumer Maths, class activities related to cabinet making/ carpentry – have recognised failings with the system we are currently using ... it has served as a good pilot program.*

Yet, in responding to the second questionnaire, it was said that there are still pockets of resistance to working with students at risk: 'Youth work model of teaching not always welcome' and 'Some teachers are inflexible when dealing with at risk students and will not modify classes/courses which causes problems'. The many other pressures on teachers, for obtaining good academic results and for undertaking administrative tasks were also mentioned as a problem. For example:

> *Still seems to be a small core group of* (FSS committed) *teachers, but this also has to do with the nature of the school and a continued push for raising expectations and focusing on the more traditional academic results, etc.*
>
> *Still some* (teachers) *are restricted by other administrative pressures. It's slow, but some will modify program and integrate FSS Program learning without core curriculum outcomes.*

Participating and seeing the benefits

Illustrating the importance in changing staff attitudes of staff participating in assisting students at risk and in seeing the benefits for students and themselves, it was noted that:

> *While teachers have always been responsible in identifying 'students at risk' and accommodating their needs in the curriculum, support programs have developed the commitment to both identification and addressing needs.*

Another strategy that has worked to increase staff acceptance is making programs for students at risk highly visible within the school:

Increasing numbers of staff see benefits of the program and ...*(are willing to be)* involved *(and)* to incorporate some TAFE certificate courses *(in their programs)*.

Members of an Area Network Committee made the following comments about at risk students being involved in positive projects within the school:

> (One) *thing I found which has been very positive in terms of acceptance of these programs in the school is to get the kids to work within the school, that is undertake some projects. Some of our Year 11 and 12 students last*

year, and a group of Year 11 students this year, have actually taken on the development of the grounds projects and they've been quite startling. ... one's right in the front entrance of the school ... and the staff have seen it and ... it's focused back on those kids. And they can see that the kids are putting something back into the school.

While at one time, some teachers were pleased to see these students working outside the school in alternative programs, this attitude is now changing.

... a lot of our programs were initially add-on programs and I guess to some extent, some teachers saw that as an advantage for them because they didn't have to deal with this particular student on this particular day because they knew that student wasn't there. So, it was 'get them out of the school' type stuff. However, now I think the school staff is firmly behind ... the Vocational Pathways Program. They can see that there are distinct benefits for the school, but more importantly, for the students, in that the course caters for their needs, (including) *academic* (needs) *in a broader sense.*

Improved communication between staff about students at risk

With the integration of programs, communication between staff in alternative and mainstream programs was also improving, leading to positive outcomes for students and improved teacher attitudes:

... if you have a student in one of these programs and ... the staff involved tend to get to know the student very well, they've got the opportunity then to pass on fairly important information to other teachers who happen to take them on in classes outside the program. So they can appreciate the difficulties that this particular student is having and cater for how they deliver the work to them. And that's been a good offshoot, whereas normally it would have been the student in the classroom, no idea what his problem is or her problem is or whatever, having all the troubles that you have with kids like that in the classroom.

Important factors in influencing teachers to be more flexible in their practice to accommodate students at risk appear to include both awareness of the range of personally difficult circumstances in which some students find themselves, and the difference that appropriate action at school can make. For example, one respondent who indicated that teacher effectiveness is developing well remarked: 'Other staff seem to have more compassion and patience with particular students once they have become aware of students' circumstances and problems'. Other comments included:

If students are identified as at risk then classroom teachers are more willing to modify programs to accommodate their needs. Other staff provide relevant programs to mix students outside the classroom.

Staff who directly teach the students meet formally and informally to take a case management approach to teaching and learning. Being equipped with

wider knowledge on individual students can lead to staff taking an interest in the person and the chosen vocational pathway.

Staff development activities

The importance in changing teacher attitudes of helping teachers to make connections with students, raising their levels of awareness, and showing them that they 'can make a difference', was emphasised by many Area Network Committees. It was said that it is not enough to provide teachers with new strategies if they do not care about these students, are not listening, communicating and connecting with them. Such teacher attitudes, of course, have an adverse effect on student motivation. Thus, they said, teachers who are currently unable to relate to students could profit from mentoring, for example, by a student welfare officer, or from a program of professional development.

Some comments from second questionnaire respondents were as follows:

A small number of staff have recognised that students at risk require a different approach but still have difficulty in changing teaching styles given demands of time and diversity in learning abilities.

We hold student support planning meetings to assist teachers work with students at risk. We still need to do constant professional development of staff.

Teachers need to be inserviced/trained to effectively deal with 'students at risk'. Some inservice has taken place.

More teachers need awareness of what is being done. This is difficult in a big school and at this time of year. Research measures will be undertaken soon to demonstrate the effectiveness of our efforts.

In an Area Network Committee meeting, it was said that professional development should have the intention of 'shifting consciousness' – coming to accept that teachers can make a difference just in terms of the way they are treating students – showing that they care, and in the way they communicate and shift responsibility towards the students. This is important for all students not just those in alternative programs. Comments made included: 'Should be how it is with all students' and 'can make a difference with every student'. It was said that teachers also need to recognise the variety of learning styles among students and learn to use agencies in support of students.

Specific suggestions for teachers from Area Network Committees were as follows:

- have a focus on achieving success and on responding to the needs of students to get good marks;
- treat students with past histories with a 'level of respect';
- make students responsible for their own participation and direction;
- treat students as adults;
- talk about your own life so that you are seen as 'human' by the students;

- help students express themselves appropriately to adults; and
- consult students on and/or negotiate the content of programs.

In the East Gippsland/Latrobe/Wellington focus group, it was recommended that teachers show a connection between what goes on in the 'real world' and what goes on in school. Teachers also need to be flexible in their delivery of programs and become involved in decision-making:

> *If* (teachers) *have the ability to shift the focus from employment to training to academic to life skills at the right time in the development of the young people then a difference is made. This flexibility in the normal school curriculum where it can be accommodated appears to keep more people connected. The dedication and the ability of teachers to link into the young people's issues further enhances the success of this initiative. Teachers at the coal face making decisions re spending has also helped the community development approach to the success of the program.*

Some strategies for assisting staff in developing skills in working with potential early leavers were suggested and requested, as described below.

(i) In one region (Frankston/Peninsula), professional development for a Boys' Education Project had been achieved through working with a facilitator who enabled teachers to:
   - reflect on ideas with a critical friend;
   - share ideas and get feedback about good teaching and learning practices through 'show and tell' in a friendly environment: 'We were not scared to talk about things that hadn't worked'; and
   - identify and 'promote principles that we believe in'.

The importance of building in an evaluation process for such a project, so that 'schools and groups of schools can make use of sharing experiences to solve problems in a local way', was also mentioned. It was noted, however, that: 'You can't measure (changes) in six months'.

(ii) Across all regions, the opportunity for visiting other programs was requested, to be followed up with a Statewide Forum about good practice principles. The purpose of this would be to raise the level of understanding of good principles and work out implications for practice. The timing of this activity (perhaps followed up with a local forum) needed to be around July-August so that it could feed into school planning for the following year. An important aspect of the forums would be to have 'high powered feedback from critical friends'.

It was noted that teacher training should include more about the needs of individuals and engender a sense of willingness to change and to be flexible. There was also recognition that teachers are an ageing population with many having 'run out of energy' and that some students are not suited to a mainstream curriculum at all. 'We simply run out of time and energy. We know what to do and how to do it – just doing it is the problem'.

STRUCTURAL CHANGE

Discipline and welfare policies

One school was trying to achieve cultural and structural change through working with staff and students to rewrite the welfare and discipline policy as part of the school charter. The FSS Program and a few people, led by an assistant principal who had taken the initiative in this area, had provided the impetus to rewrite the policy. They had sought input from groups of students and staff to develop a sense of ownership, starting with identification and clarification of values to replace the old policy which was 'just *full* of rules – you shall do this, you shall not do that'. Instead, they are focusing now on building connectedness through establishing a structure, that is, a student welfare committee, and organising a staff in-service with experts in the field, and gathering data about the mental health status of the student population. It was also noted that, in general, staff need to revisit policies from time to time to remind themselves about what they mean in practice.

One respondent to the second questionnaire reported that 'differentiating the curriculum has become a (school) charter priority'. Another respondent reported that there is also 'more focus on early intervention/preventive action – Stop Think Do'. Ways in which this might be promoted are reflected in comments from other respondents. These included: '(Approaching staff to) offer elective activities'; 'Move to case management practices by school welfare staff'; 'Cross Key Learning Area (KLA) meetings to develop and implement common themes e.g. time and travel, life skills in English and Maths (for students in CGEA courses)'; 'Modification of tasks to allow satisfactory completion; recognition of different learning styles; regular consultation with program coordinator'; '(Implementing a) mentor approach with Year 9 Mindware students has been excellent; major staff development work has been largely effective' and 'PD provided on at risk issues'. Assistance from agencies in promoting whole school change was also mentioned:

> *Consultations with BAYSA youth workers; student management strategies given by BAYSA youth workers; SSSP* (Senior Secondary Students Support Program) *is part of the school's student welfare response plans; staff briefings, presentations; BAYSA workshops/professional development for teaching staff.*

Timetabling changes

A point was made in an Area Network Committee meeting that if teachers attended a professional development day, and it were run as students are expected to operate every day, 'there'd have been a revolution by now. It's just unnatural'. People criticised the 'lock-step process (of learning) that doesn't fit in with the way students learn, but it's an efficient way of running an organisation'. It was said that schools needed to be given support in looking at how timetables could be restructured and how the day-to-day running of schools could be different. School structures needed

to be changed to allow teachers to work for a whole day with the same students, even if the groups remained about the same size. However, it was thought that class sizes for at risk students need to be kept to a maximum of twenty and that only a small team of teachers should work with them (see also p. 63). The point was made that such students sometimes 'get lost' in large secondary schools. Indeed, some committee members thought that in Years 7-8, a similar situation should exist, and a pastoral care program be put in place at Year 11.

The length of time students work with teachers was said to be very important if they were to engage properly with the subject area. A theory/practice connection can also be effected if these can be undertaken on the same day. The observation was made that students say they learn when they like the teacher. Short lessons, however, often prevent teachers from developing good relationships with students. When teachers are with a group of students for a full day, a positive relationship is more likely to develop. Extended periods of time with students make a difference to both students and teachers. These observations were supported by comments from students in the focus groups. For example, students in Program C thought that a more extended period of time in which to work (here two periods rather than one) was very important in that they 'don't have to jump from thing to thing'. They 'get distracted and then don't go back and finish'. The two periods allocated for the program allowed 'things' to 'sink in' and they could go over them again to ensure that they were right. 'Having time to do a good job' was seen as very important. 'When it's all rushed it doesn't come out as good'.

Supporting other comments by focus group students (see p. 74), many respondents to the second questionnaire believed that the difficulties created by students attending out-of-school activities, on either a block or weekly basis, was a major barrier to the outcomes of the program. Typical comments across many regions were: 'Some programs were block release which had negative impact on student progress in some subjects at the school'; 'Interruption to normal schooling from day out'; 'Some students missed classes during one afternoon to attend the Business Admin Certificate course. This caused some concern with some teachers' and 'Curriculum demands of the mainstream. Fitting into school timetable (that is, limited flexibility)'. Thus changes in this area appear to be essential.

This theme was taken up by many respondents to the second questionnaire, who identified the support provided by the school administration in facilitating timetable adjustments, encouraging support from other staff, facilitating arrangements with agencies and parents, and being actively supportive of the programs within the school.

Only three respondents said that there was no development in school practices to accommodate at risk students and one of these indicated that the school had put a block timetable in place to allow students out of the school on Wednesdays. In general, school organisation and practices (in FSS schools) are changing to accommodate a greater range of student needs (46% 'developing well', 30% early stages of development and 17% significantly achieved). These changes mostly

concern reorganisation of the timetable to accommodate special programs, work placements (generally one day per week) and off-campus courses.

Thus there appears to be widespread recognition amongst FSS Program schools of the need for putting structures into place to accommodate students who are at risk of leaving school early. This is reflected in the high numbers of responses indicating that changes had been made in timetabling arrangements. 'Block timetabling' was common, to build in at least one day per week to accommodate special programs (e.g. Young Achievement Australia, outreach adventure camps, work placements, part-time New Apprenticeships and traineeships), and off-campus programs (e.g. work skills, TAFE courses, adult education courses, literacy programs and distance education).

Accommodating alternative programs (see also pp. 100–104)

Respondents to the second questionnaire emphasised the need to take an interventionist 'whole school' approach in building new structural arrangements for all students. Two main approaches were taken:

(i) Integration of all programs.

Where 'special' programs were offered for particular groups of students, these tended to be included on the timetable as 'normal offerings', with students also taking subjects from the mainstream curriculum. Comments included:

Students do 'mainstream' subjects like a normal Year 10 class, as well as VCE Industry and Enterprise, and one day a week work placement. Students are not alienated or disadvantaged by being in the program and have all vocational options open to them.

The integration was achieved (and) *the FSS students were not seen as a separate group, which is good. This was partly due to the group having a 'core' of students, plus others, who would join in at various times (Regional program linked but external to schools).*

This integration appears to be occurring slightly more extensively in metropolitan schools. In general, a higher proportion of schools from the provincial and rural sectors indicated that curriculum integration was in 'early stages of development'. Significant development was reported in one large provincial network (83%) and one metropolitan network (80%). SWCs who are located in these networks reported focused holistic approaches to catering for students at risk, as follows:

This is developing well in that we already have a 'whole school' approach to student support planning and our FSS program is one of the strategies we have in place for our students at risk.

Student support coordinator develops integrated studies incorporating a number of work outcomes from different VCE studies.

As a principal commented, schools need to be 'prepared to adapt school experience to serve the needs of students rather than require the students to fit the mould of the schools'. Very important also is the willingness to network and cooperate with other schools. It was also noted that the often abrupt differences between primary and secondary school pedagogy needed to be smoothed over for many students.

(ii) Aligning alternative programs with elective programs

Another arrangement was to build in a special program for at risk students when other Year 10 students were in an elective program. This provided flexibility to 'free up' the curriculum and 'cater to a wider range of student needs'. Building space in the timetable also meant that 'students do not need to catch up on work missed when attending off-campus courses'. High numbers of VET students had helped to provide a critical mass for arguing for this type of arrangement. Sometimes groups were timetabled separately, for example, a vocational education group that included work experience, and a group undertaking the CGEA. Two respondents indicated that the CGEA is now incorporated into the ongoing curriculum and many reported that links and partnerships have been strengthened with external programs that assist students in staying on at school. Other arrangements included:

- reducing the student workload (that is, taking fewer subjects);
- operating a part-time school program so that students can attend a special 'catch-up' program in a community-based learning centre;
- TAFE attendance one day a week, one day at work and three days at school; and
- students studying one VCE unit over a whole year.

Arrangements for individual students in terms of times and subjects were seen to require staff flexibility. It was also recognised that some at risk students do better when fewer staff teach them. This provides 'consistency of delivery' and opportunities to 'build positive relationships' (see also p. 63).

MONITORING PROGRESS OF POTENTIAL EARLY LEAVERS

Monitoring the progress of at risk students appears to be an area of schooling in need of further investigation and development. Sixteen percent of respondents to the second questionnaire reported 'no development' and 25% said that their schools were in 'early stages of development'. FSS Coordinators were generally less confident than other coordinators and Principals/Senior administrators of development in this area. There was some acknowledgment of the need for further work to be done in developing systems for assessment, reporting and monitoring students at risk (see Appendix 8 for specific strategies for monitoring student progress). For example, comments from individual schools included: 'Redesigning school reports is still an issue to be addressed'; 'Mainly through case management but record keeping/data base is still a time-intensive activity', and:

Strong assessment and reporting philosophy and practice but not necessarily targeted for monitoring progress. Pretty well covered in one school year, but there is a recognition that a better 'hand over' of information from one year to the next needs to be undertaken.

No, assessment and reporting is only really modified for students who went overseas or are integrated – not really those at risk.

There is evidence, however, of recognition that effective assessment and monitoring systems are an essential component of strategies for assisting students at risk and that their development in schools needs to be given priority. For example: 'I believe that the systems are not yet fully developed within the college, but this is the focus of work still to be undertaken' and '... much work is being done on making the reporting system more sensitive'. Similarly: 'Trying systems such as self-monitoring, period by period behaviour sheet, redesigning reports to be more appropriate'; 'We have made some progress with development of work requirements which cater for the range of students' and 'Observable demonstration of outcomes in some courses; some modified assessment tasks; some scribing for dyslexic students'.

Thirteen percent of respondents reported that they had 'significantly achieved' putting effective assessment and monitoring systems in place and another 38% said this area was 'developing well'. In general, their responses indicate a need for:

(i) assessment methods that are flexible and student centred; and

(ii) monitoring strategies that involve parents and key internal and external personnel and serve as a basis for timely action.

In one Area Network Committee focus group, this issue was discussed in some depth. For example: 'In the past, some teachers have not been very tolerant of students missing mainstream classes to attend a special program and this has affected students' assessment'. It was reported, however, that there are signs of teachers' attitudes changing and that competency standards and Key Competencies were very helpful in this regard:

If you've got somebody out on (a special) *program on Tuesday afternoons, your reports come in* (saying that a student) *hasn't attended, hasn't done this. That's changing now. We've really made a big fuss about this in saying this is a legitimate program, you have to modify assessment tasks. The work load has to be different. And finally, there's an acceptance that that's OK and the report for that child can be different. And even if it's one major* (work requirement), *at least put a non-assessed for that, not a fail. And I think that's finally happening now and it's just taken a lot of time. But in our school system, it is the first time we've done as much* (alternative assessment).

We had the same difficulty with particular staff saying this kid hasn't turned up on this day. Thanks very much but we already told you that. But in terms

of assessment I think it has broadened out a bit. I mean key competencies ... which is recognising things other than ... 'can read at this level' or whatever. Those competency areas that employers are looking at (are being recognised in schools). *And a number of us are going into those certificate courses – Certificate 1, Certificate 2, pre-apprenticeship courses, which are very relevant for these kids, more relevant than getting a pass in Year 10, in this subject or whatever. Because that's where they're heading. So it is a direct link* (with) *where they're actually going. I only have one concern about certificate courses, that is, we've got that many certificate courses operating that we* (could be) *lowering our standards. That's the only concern I have there.*

Multiple programs may also increase teachers' workloads (which, in turn, affects school culture) unless a practical mechanism for assessment and reporting students' learning outcomes is put in place. As one person said:

I'm a bit ambivalent as to where we are with changing the culture ... partly because quite a few of our subjects have been outside the school and we are having to work harder to get information in about how the students are going. Because they're not necessarily taught by a teacher or staff who can, over a cup of coffee at recess, say some good things about how so and so's going. So that's a difficult issue ... talking about that only recently.

6 FULL SERVICE SCHOOLS PROGRAM ACTION RESEARCH CASE STUDIES

OVERVIEW

Teachers in the FSS Program were invited to engage in grass roots action research, with others in their Program Areas, to produce collective insights about how they might re-connect marginalised young people to schooling more effectively. Approximately fifty participants from seven Program Areas spent several months sharing ideas and discussing and documenting aspects of their practice that made a difference. Working with facilitators, they constructed the following case studies that exemplified their practice.

Each action research team determined its own focus and direction. This meant there was variation in the approaches taken, depending on the stage of development of the particular FSS program. Some teams worked on common projects and met on three or four separate occasions. Others met less frequently, preferring to work on particular issues within their schools. The distance between schools in some country locations meant that meetings were not practical and links were made through the facilitator. As participation in the action research teams was voluntary, membership also varied from four to ten people. Most participants were FSS coordinators. Other participants included classroom teachers, some principals and personnel from local community agencies.

In the Ballarat Program Area, an action research project was conducted throughout the life of the FSS Program (Brown, 2000) and only excerpts from a much larger report are presented here as one of the case studies.

Key Themes and Insights

Engaging students in learning

Echoing many of the themes discussed earlier in this report, the following insights emerged strongly throughout the case studies. Re-connecting students to learning to a point where schooling is relevant for them, requires intensive personal support and educational activities that are based around their needs and interests. Together, these elements contribute to each of them 'feeling special' and valued as someone who is worthwhile both in the school and as a person. This means committing resources to provide case management and pathways planning, and smaller groupings of students with fewer teachers so they can form positive relationships with adults who are genuinely interested in them. The teacher/student relationship is a crucial dimension of programs for at risk students. How teachers construct

learning environments and activities that are conducive to the development of positive relationships between teachers and their students was regarded as so important to one action research team that they interviewed teachers in the network to find out if there were common strategies that seem to make a difference. This exercise enabled them to 'see how other schools were dealing with similar problems and to expand (the pool of) possible responses that are available to deal with these issues'.

Many students are also in need of making new peer friendships and shedding old destructive ones 'where they were unquestioning followers'. Some schools have found that outdoor adventure activities offer an environment that is conducive to forming constructive relationships with both peers and adults and, in the process, developing personal and social skills.

Work provides a point of relevance for most young people who want to leave school early. It is something to which they all aspire either to put them on the path to independence or to escape boredom or failure at school. Most FSS programs were successful in building in work preparation, work experience and work placements, usually for one day per week and sometimes for extended periods. Work also provided a framework for literacy and numeracy development, which is considered to be a priority for future programs aimed at reducing school leaving or making the transition from school into further education and training or employment.

Most case studies mentioned flexibility as being an important element of school culture to accommodate the range of student needs and circumstances. Teacher inflexibility, for example, 'being precious about kids missing out on what the teacher wants them to do when the kids are attending external courses' is still a barrier to be overcome in some schools. In order to build their capacity for addressing the needs of potential early school leavers, schools need to build in more opportunities for teachers to discuss effective learning for these students and the variety of settings in which it may take place, for example, workplaces. More development also needs to occur on ways 'to integrate students' experiences (in FSS programs) into their 'normal' schoolwork and life rather than as an 'ad hoc' extra activity. This is particularly important for Years 9 and 10 but, since the 'normal' program 'was doing little for these students' in their schooling to that point, consideration needs to be given to help students who are participating at the margins in Years 7 and 8 to become more effectively engaged. A further aspect of flexibility is that it seems important for programs not to be mandatory, that is, students need to feel that they have some control by 'opting in'.

In one case study, teachers suggested that students need to receive more formal recognition for their achievements in all their courses and programs. An associated issue is assessment in alternative programs that may have a range of dimensions. Some schools have had some success with using Key Competencies as a framework for assessment that also has some meaning for students. Certificate courses, for example, VET modules (TAFE), the Work Education Certificate and the CGEA are, in part, addressing this need.

Some students have extraordinarily difficult lives beyond school. Many schools have enlisted the services of local agencies and private providers (with money obtained through the FSS Program) to address particular needs. A youth worker (who has the contacts and networks) can often coordinate the services required by a student according to his or her circumstances. Case management is an essential dimension of schooling for potential early school leavers. One country network had such success with using case management as a central focus for improving transition from schooling that it is exploring how this can be expanded into a district-focused initiative.

It is not surprising, therefore, that at the end of the FSS Program, many schools and FSS Program Areas were wondering how they would find the funds to continue to provide this support. One case study suggests that policy development and planning in the Department of Education, Employment and Training and the Department of Human Services should be more closely aligned to address common youth issues, for example, common geographical boundaries would assist in coordinating services.

Using action research to improve practice

The case studies suggest that collaborative evaluation and reflection on practice 'has been instrumental in increasing teachers' awareness of additional possibilities for improving the education of students at risk'. It has challenged their views, opened up new ideas and given them access to a bigger pool of resources and contacts. One team concluded that working cooperatively across schools and meeting with a facilitator 'once a semester (or even once a year) ... would be extremely worthwhile ... to help schools develop strategies to cope with students who are at risk'. Another case study gives a detailed account of the many professional development activities for teachers, that were planned as a significant part of the action research project in that area.

Some teams were keen to collect data on particular programs and engagement in learning from students, their parents, teachers and principals. This was additional to focus group data collected by the facilitator in each team (described in Chapter 3). Gaining insight from students through a facilitator was considered extremely useful and in one case 'humbling'. One team 'would like students to continue to be a major part of such a process' as it 'helped identify successes and areas for improvement, ... and kept teachers focused on students' needs'. Two teams also emphasised the spin-offs for students in involving them in this way. It made them feel important, enabled them to meet other students in similar courses and, in one project, visit a university (an option many may not have considered).

Most teams would like to continue their action research work. However, this is dependent, to some extent, on whether they can find the funds to support teacher release, travel and a skilled facilitator. One team suggested that this might be a role for the Department of Education, Employment and Training's regional personnel. For most teams, the action research team was an added dimension of

their FSS committee, promoting the idea of sharing ideas and resources even more. Although there were many benefits, some teachers suggested that the action research project should have been a part of the FSS Program right from the start:

> *Meeting with other schools has only occurred during the evaluation process. We feel that it would have been of more value if the schools involved had met right from the beginning of the FSS programs. In this way we could have shared ideas, resources, contacts, etc. Also, meeting with other schools, could have helped to clarify our own concerns, and to, perhaps, see things from another perspective.*

Teachers in two teams recommended that longitudinal research needed to be undertaken to establish the real effects of these alternative programs in reducing early school leaving and the best ways to measure student achievement.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A TIME FOR REFLECTION

FSS Program Case Study[6]: Ballarat Program Area

The Focus: Professional development for teachers in the region.

In the Ballarat Network, an Action Research Project was planned from the outset of the FSS Program initiative, to evaluate and improve the projects and programs established across the schools. Here, the story of the second action research cycle is told: concerning efforts to generate professional development programs for teachers in the region on the basis of what had been learnt from students, case managers and FSS program facilitators in the first cycle.

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Introduction

The Full Service Schools Program initiative advocated a cross-sectoral approach, with an emphasis on networking, innovation, flexibility, communication and professional development. Such a program held a particular appeal for schools in the Ballarat area, which also included Daylesford and Beaufort. The statistics on students exiting the school system before completion of the VCE were, and

[6] This case study is drawn from a much larger document entitled 'Full Service Schools: Action Research Report', written by Leann Brown and distributed to members of the Ballarat Network.

continue to be, alarming. A Working Party was quickly established, and began meeting in the second half of 1999. These first meetings highlighted the particular emphases the committee wished to see incorporated into the successful delivery of all aspects of this initiative, as the following extract from the minutes of one meeting illustrates:

> *The Working Party believe that the following principles should form the basis of moving forward:*
>
> - *That the approach to these students be 'Ballarat Community' not 'single school'.*
> - *That schools collectively develop/access programs and that students are identified and placed in these programs.*
> - *That consistent processes are followed in the identification of these students.*
> - *That programs need to be integrated into schooling, not separated. There needs to be recognition of learning and experiences from the programs back at school, if off-site.* (Minutes, September 10, 1999)

As a means of targeting the students most at risk, a number of significant links were established across all sectors of education within the region. The Program has drawn participants from across a wide range of education providers. As a result of this networking, the Program developed a strong community identity and a number of unique strengths. It incorporated three key components – students, case managers and facilitators in innovative and reflective programs. It was also decided that the Program would incorporate an Action Research Project, run by the Centre for Rural and Regional Health at the University of Ballarat, to ensure not only that evaluation was constantly taking place but also that it was being continually documented.

This case study tells the story of the second cycle of the Action Research Project in which the focus shifted from the Full Service Schools projects and programs for students to the professional development of teachers in region.

Objectives of the Professional Development (PD) Program

On the basis of the first action research cycle, the key to achieving long-term goals appeared to lie with the establishment of a program of long-term, ongoing and relevant professional development. This case study indicates that such professional development may be most effective when it is narrative-based, occurs outside the school environment, and encourages networking across schools.

The following process objectives were identified by the FSS Program Area Network Committee and the FSS Professional Development (PD) Sub-committee as appropriate for the Professional Development program:

1. To convene focus groups of teachers not currently involved in the Program to ensure that their perceptions are acknowledged and their voices heard on issues relating to teaching and learning and the building of relationships with students.
2. To focus professional development programs on the central issue of communication. This should involve the development and maintenance of strategies to support the 'reconnecting' of teachers and students.
3. In the design of the professional development programs, to explore issues raised in Cycle One such as the following:
   - the negative labelling of some students by teachers;
   - the need for more balanced approaches to teaching and learning (for example, integrating theory and practice);
   - the provision of debriefing strategies and professional support for teachers; and
   - the need to find ways to ensure that all students experience success and are acknowledged for their achievements, whatever they may be.

Action and Activities

When faced with the task of identifying ideas for professional development (PD) activities to support the FSS Program, participants in a focus group of FSS program facilitators discussed at length the problems schools faced in relation to 'engaging' teachers in meaningful PD activities. A belief was expressed that within many schools there is a 'polarisation', in which some staff think that PD is 'fantastic' and others are 'threatened by the challenge' that it presents. It was perceived as important for teachers to experience in some manner the developmental experiences of the FSS program facilitators, but that any opportunities for these experiences would have to be organised in such a way that they would minimise such 'polarisation.' Ideas suggested included the importance of teachers identifying issues relating to themselves, such as 'what am I doing wrong?,' and packaging any PD activities developed so as to indicate that 'we realise it's tough, but we can help.'

Other issues that facilitators thought could be focused on included:

- examination versus practically-based testing (some students respond better to practical tests);
- experientially-based learning and reflections;
- issues related to self-paced learning; and
- the need for investigating a variety of teaching approaches, as students appeared not to have 'learnt how to learn'.

The Cycle One phase centred heavily on the Full Service Schools projects and programs, thus the responses were student/facilitator oriented. Teachers were naturally affected by the student responses, which indicated a strong resentment of the way they are treated by school staff. In the words of one facilitator, there is 'the need to provide some form of professional supervision/support for teachers where they can openly share their experiences in a safe environment, where it's okay to say difficult things about themselves, and others, without feeling guilty or bad'.

Thus Cycle Two, the Professional Development Program, was designed to incorporate a range of strategies, which it was hoped would address these needs. The end of the first year of the program was marked in October 1999 by a dinner at the Mid-City Motel with a guest presenter who engaged participants in new and innovative ways of thinking about teaching and learning. Subsequently, a meeting was held in November 1999, at which a Professional Development Sub-Committee was formed. This group began work on a Professional Development Program which was to include the following:

Early 2000	Meetings of FSS Professional Development Sub-Committee
April 2000	Development of 'Penny Dropped' activities.
May 2000	Warrenmang Conference.
June 2000	Mini-Action Research Projects in place.
June 2000	Red Lion Dinner.
September 2000	'Further Down Multiple Pathways to Learning' Dinner

The following summary is drawn from the issues as they were discussed and reflected upon by the members of the FSS Program Committee and the PD Sub-Committee.

The 'Penny Dropped' Activity

The first full-day conference at Warrenmang was preceded by a series of presentations to whole staff groups from each school. These were held in normal staff meeting structures and run by two committee members. One was a teacher from the school and the other was a teacher from a different school. This cross-school interaction was seen as a valuable preparation for the whole day conference. It encouraged teachers to begin discussing their own teaching stories by highlighting the best teaching moments they could recall. The findings were collated and displayed at the Warrenmang conference under the heading of 'The penny dropped'.

Reflection

The two-fold aim was to demonstrate the cross-school nature of the FSS Program and to encourage teachers to reach out together in an attempt to meet the needs of at risk students. Some schools reported successful presentations, but the overall picture was one of great difficulty. It became clear to the committee members that the imposition of new methods of presentations at normal staff meetings is very much connected with changing the school culture which still lags behind so many other changes in education.

A Full-Day Conference

The conference, held at the Warrenmang Resort, was designed to engage teachers in reflection on their own learning and consequently on their own teaching. The conference title, 'Multiple Pathways to Learning', echoed the title of the 1999 PD Dinner, and created a pathway to further PD activities which then became 'Further

Down the Multiple Pathways to Learning'. The activities were designed to highlight the teacher as the 'reflective practitioner'. The value of maintaining a sustainable approach to PD was acknowledged with the setting up of mini-Action Research Project groups, which would focus on a personally selected teaching issue over a four week period.

Reflection

The day drew together a number of the key themes highlighted in the preliminary activities of the sub-committee. The sharing of stories appears to be a most fitting methodology for teachers. These practitioners stand in front of groups of people almost every working hour. They are rarely alone or off-duty while in their workplace. Dialogue takes place around them constantly and much of the dialogue is 'other' centered. Hence, the opportunity to be listened to instead of always being the listener, to tell their story rather than asking others to write theirs, and to listen to peers as they reveal their own wonderful insights into life in humorous, passionate, loving, intelligent and honest stories, was once again an affirmation of their worth and the worthiness of their profession. The fact that this conference actually focused on those in their care who are most fragile, unloved, frustrated and 'just plain difficult' made the sharing even more poignant.

Both facilitators and case managers were involved in presentations. They were able to demonstrate the fact that learning can take many forms and that teaching is a relational experience.

At the conclusion of the conference participants were divided into groups which, it was hoped, would provide support for mini-Action Research Projects – small step activities designed to bring about change in student/teacher engagement. The mini-action research component did not work according to plan because participants were divided into random groups rather than groups of teachers with similar curriculum interests. However those small step activities which did take place provided evidence of what can be achieved when teachers are willing to take risks in their relationships with students.

A Follow-Up Dinner

This dinner (the Red Lion Dinner) was a follow up for the mini-Action Research groups. It was an attempt to maintain the focus on cross-school links and to support teachers in their efforts to change. Video and photographic presentations of a number of students in their Full Service Schools programs kept the students in focus and re-emphasised the nexus in operation between teachers learning to teach from watching students learning in alternative contexts. A Drama consultant presented a number of strategies for effective teaching and learning. From this, a number of schools undertook individual drama-based activities on effective teaching and learning and relationships within schools. Teachers then presented individual reports on the progress of their own mini-projects.

Reflection

It was clear that the small groups formed at Warrenmang had not been as successful as initially hoped. Attendance at the evening was low and the general impression was that, because some groups had not done their homework, the members were too embarrassed to come! The teachers who did attend, however, became involved in a moving sharing of the personal efforts they had made in terms of the strategies discussed at Warrenmang. This bore out, once again, the value of allowing teachers to be heard in their personal struggles with the most difficult teaching/student-related issues in their classes. As an FSS Program facilitator noted:

> *There is a need to take teachers into their own personal growth in order for them to re-engage with kids.*

Full Service Schools Show-Case Dinner

The major Professional Development function, which would draw stakeholders from all areas of the program, was the Professional Dinner. The end of the first year of the program had been marked by a dinner at the Mid-City Motel with a guest presenter who illustrated new and innovative ways of teachers extending themselves and of using these steps in their work with students. This dinner, complementing the second cycle, sprang from a different perspective. While it was agreed that a guest presenter could be of value, the PD sub-committee had worked together across the earlier PD sessions and had developed a clearer sense of direction in terms of the aims of the whole program. It seemed important to target existing strengths as a group and as a region. The fact that the cross-school aspect of the program had worked successfully so far needed to be highlighted.

The PD sub-committee decided to organise a dinner as a show-case for the FSS project in order to reflect the Community nature of program. Schools were invited to send ten staff, as well as representatives from outside agencies involved in the project. As the program revolved around developing ways of engaging students in their own learning, students were included as a focus and participated in key activities within the event. The evening was timed to coincide with 'Adult Learners Week' and one hundred and ten people attended.

As a means of celebrating the successes of the many facets of the program, it was decided that the key theme of this dinner should be 'Celebrating Our Local Learning Community'. The work of students in their FSS programs was show-cased through a professionally filmed video production and students also presented a dramatisation of their hopes and beliefs about student-centred learning. Groups of teachers also worked on the formulation of stories entitled 'Magic Moments in Teaching' while facilitators engaged participants in activities, which sparked creative concepts around the idea of 'Multiple Pathways to Learning' (see Attachment A, *Ballarat Full Service Schools Celebrate Learning*).

Reflection

The dinner marked a shift in the acceptance of the role of the participants in a learning community. The types of activities engaged in at the dinner involved various combinations of teachers and learners. Students were shown as both learners (in their FSS program placements) and teachers (in their dramatisation activity). The overwhelmingly positive feedback from participants indicated the value of allowing students to show teachers some of the things that work in the relationships between these two groups. The facilitator and case manager presentations once again strengthened the concept of community-based learning.

Individual School Projects

The final PD project for the second cycle was an individual project to be run by each school in the Full Service Schools Program. Each school received a grant of $1000 to be spent on appropriate follow up in terms of Professional Development plans and outcomes. The decisions made by each school were reported on at the last formal meeting of the Full Service Schools committee. This sharing once again highlighted the very strong networks which had developed between participating schools. Each person at that meeting spoke of the PD to be run in his or her school and of the wider-reaching benefits of the FSS Program. Projects were described that ranged from small changes in school organisation to allow for more flexible delivery of curriculum to a mini-action research project conducted by staff who had attended the PD Dinner.

Reflection

The final FSS meeting crystallised many of the key themes which had been emerging over the course of the whole Professional Development program. The small steps taken at each stage of the program had led to a willingness to undertake further steps along the 'multiple pathways to learning' within each school. All schools were now attempting to implement the various kinds of learning which had taken place in the Professional Development program.

This meeting highlighted the fact that the whole Professional Development program, as part of the Action Research process, had enabled a number of significant changes to occur. Key sequential *small steps* that occurred include:

- change for teachers in overcoming the barrier to hearing and accepting what students say;
- acceptance and endorsement of what students say about being a learner; and
- acceptance of the need to act on these issues.

The round table meeting at the end of November indicated that teachers had indeed gone ahead and implemented some of the necessary changes within schools.

Overall Reflections on the Professional Development Program

The Professional Development package as a whole appears to have achieved a number of outcomes, as explained below.

- The cross-school connections for teachers have mirrored the cross-school connections for students in the FSS programs. Both groups have expressed enthusiasm for these opportunities. A number of the traditional barriers between schools have been removed.
- The community-based nature of the program has opened up opportunities for collaboratively exploring different ways of teaching and learning within existing educational organisations and structures – in which University, TAFE, schools and community providers work together.
- Local ownership of the FSS Program by the Ballarat community learning network has led to recognition of its capacity to deliver quality programs such as those show-cased at the final PD dinner.
- The need for teachers to step back and 'reflect' in order to engage more effectively with their students has been evident in the feedback from project participants.
- There has been a recognition of the power of *small steps* in changing the culture of schools and the teaching and learning patterns within schools.
- The generation of discussion around better practice by teachers within their own school staffs has contributed to an awareness of alternative ways of approaching some of the most difficult day-to-day tasks related to teaching and learning. In line with feedback from case managers, it became evident that significant progress had been made in the FSS and the PD programs but that very little had changed in the structures of the learning environment within schools for both teachers and students. As one person noted:

School curriculum is falling behind where kids are at! ... kids change, needs change but school structures stay the same...

Ballarat Full Service Schools Celebrate Learning: Attachment A

At the end of Term 3, a host of learning activities were planned in Ballarat to coincide with Adult Learners' Week. One was the FSS activity, entitled *Further Along the Multiple Pathways to Learning*, a highly successful professional development dinner, involving 110 teachers, youth workers and students. This program was co-hosted by two teachers, who are members of the FSS PD Sub-Committee and who have been actively involved since the 1999 PD Dinner.

PD DINNER PROGRAM

1. LAB RATS

The evening commenced with a group of ten Year 11 Drama students, self-titled The Lab Rats, who performed a representation based on a series of May 1999 FSS Focus Groups involving local Year 10 students. The Focus Group delved into students' perceptions of school, what they would change if they could and what type of things they would like to do if they had the chance to spend one day a week for one term doing something else.

The students' performance was delivered with humour and accurately portrayed the sentiments of the original Focus Groups. It was a great way to start the program, as it informed those present, who had not been closely involved with the program, of the process taken by the FSS Committee to determine the type of Full Service Schools programs to develop for the students.

2. FSS STUDENT PROGRAMS

The live performance was followed by a video, shot during Term 3, which focussed on three of the range of programs run for Year 10 students since mid 1999 – Chef Heads Hospitality, YMCA Life Skills & Fitness and Introduction to Music Industry Skills. Students gave views of their personal experience of the FSS Programs in which they participated. Excerpts from the Music Industry Skills students' percussion performance, which was broadcast live on the Internet in the final week of their program, were included on the video.

3. FSS WARRENMANG PD, May 2000

The focus then shifted from the students' learning experiences to the teachers' experiences. The Chair of the Ballarat FSS Area Network Committee, a teacher at Ballarat Secondary College, reported on the FSS 'Multiple Pathways to Learning', a one-day PD Program held at Warrenmang and attended by 30 teachers from 9 schools. Reference was made to highlights such as the teachers' prepared reflections of their own curriculum experience – few remembered content, but many remembered relationships formed and the enjoyment of learning in the company of teachers who took an interest in them and had obvious enthusiasm for their

subject. Participants often showed themselves as vulnerable in the sharing of these stories.

A participant also talked about a lively activity in which two very different teaching styles were experienced – one chalk and talk history lesson on Hannibal with a test at the end (no notes allowed, to the chagrin of many), and the other an interactive participatory experience on listening skills. The interesting part of this activity was the subsequent feedback session in which each participant spoke of their response and degree of comfort or otherwise with the different teaching styles. This session revealed a similar diversity among the participating teachers to that found among students and highlighted the need to provide multiple pathways to learning for any given group.

The Mini-Action Research teams were formed to trial an idea that individual groups developed. The majority of projects, which were then carried out over a four-week period, focused on developing relationships with two students who were not currently engaging in class or with the teacher.

4. SEX, DRUGS AND ROCK'N'ROLL (Wine, Women & Song)

The former FSS Case Manager discussed the different times we live in through the use of music from the 60s through to today, and other stories. He skilfully wove together a presentation which showed that the interests and concerns of youth today are not too different from the youth of previous times.

He played excerpts of *My Generation* by The Who, *Schools Out* by Alice Cooper, *Another Brick in the Wall Part 2* by Pink Floyd and *Prisoner of Society* by Living End. While these tracks were recorded over a 30 year plus span, for those able to discern the lyrics, they reveal content and concerns of remarkable similarity. The words may be different, but the interests remain the same!

5. A MAGIC MOMENT IN LEARNING – DINNER ACTIVITY

Each table of 10 came up with their best 'Magic Moment' in learning.

The students formed a panel to judge the contributions and did an impromptu Logie Style announcement of 3rd, 2nd and 1st places, much to the amusement of all participants. Not surprisingly the winning magic moment had a punch line which focused on one of the key interests of Year 11 students! Participants on the winning table were delighted to receive a bottle of wine each for their contribution.

6. INTERGALACTIC LEARNING – AFTER DINNER ACTIVITY

Two of the facilitators of four successful FSS Life Skills programs, entitled Cornerstones, involved all participants in an original activity after dinner. The

activity focused on introducing a creature from another planet into a school environment. The audience was asked to discuss ten 'wise man's principles' to help the creature to adapt to life on earth, and in particular to help her survive in school. The ten principles proposed that would supposedly help adaptation were:

1. All people are created equal. All people possess a spark of the divine. See beyond the actions to the beauty that lies within.
2. It's not whether you win or lose, but how you play the game.
3. No one person has all the answers. Each person holds a piece of the jigsaw. So listen to each other with reverence and anticipation.
4. We are all the creator's creation. Difference and diversity are loved and valued.
5. Don't be frightened to make mistakes. That's where true learning is.
6. In the midst of darkness there is only one true light. Love is its core. Honesty is its expression.
7. Acceptance and mutual respect are the foundations on which the building of full potential is established.
8. To thine own self be true.
9. Learn with your head; dance with your body; feel with your heart ... but let wisdom be your master.
10. To all men and creatures speak softly and from a pure heart. Then you will be understood.
11. Eat no shell fish.

Each participating group was to consider one of these principles and whether it would help the creature on her journey through life and school. If deemed necessary the principle could be modified or entirely rewritten.

The participants were of an accord that the activity and the discussions surrounding the wise man's principles made them focus on issues facing students who try to make sense of their pathway through school, particularly in the context of the learning and understanding gained through FSS experiences.

7. EVALUATION

Some of the participants, in reporting back to their schools, said this was one of the best PD activities they had experienced for its rich mix of student, teacher and facilitator input – all local. Participants enjoyed the unravelling of the story of what the FSS has meant to the Ballarat, Beaufort and Daylesford schools, and adding to that story. The importance of having students involved in this PD activity cannot be underestimated and was reflected in the following evaluation comments:

'The Mount Clear students were fantastic – that's why we teach'.
'The students were terrific.'
'The Lab Rats presentation was a good start.'

'A great effort at reflecting reality of our young people through their participation.'
'I enjoyed the students' participation; their openness and truths were refreshing and challenging.'
'Lab Rats – fantastic – very entertaining.'
'Impressed with the Mount Clear students.'
'Student input really good – perhaps next time we could build on that.

A participating Principal commented: 'My thanks for an invigorating end to Term 3!' This was apparently a feeling shared by many, according to the range of feedback provided by the FSS Program Area Network Committee members from individual schools.

CASE MANAGEMENT: A FRAMEWORK FOR IMPROVING TRANSITION FROM SCHOOLING

FSS Program Case Study: Bendigo Network

The Focus: Case management and school-community agency collaboration.

The eight participating schools in this case study, although diverse both demographically and organisationally, agreed to adopt a case management framework to Full Service Schooling. Through regular bi-monthly meetings to exchange ideas, schools worked towards a shared view that this approach, together with local agency input, has resulted in a more central focus on transition in the curriculum to engage disenchanted young people, increase retention, improve tracking processes (for both continuing and exiting students), and establish meaningful training and employment pathways for those students who do leave school early.

The Author: Dr Michael Faulkner, Institute for Education, La Trobe University, Bendigo

Introduction

The Full Service Schools program, in the north central region of Victoria, involved schools in the city of Bendigo (pop. 86,000), in the two regional towns of Maryborough (pop. 9,600) and Castlemaine (pop. 6,700), and in a rural P-12 school to the north of Bendigo.

As a group, the participating schools are diverse, both demographically and organisationally. These schools serve quite distinct geographical areas, in a region with less obvious socio-cultural variability than that which characterises many parts of Melbourne. However, young people's life styles, life choices, and the

capacity to access educational and post schooling options are often substantially different if comparisons are made between young people living in Bendigo, those living towns and those living in rural locations. The organisational diversity in the participating schools is manifest in the different structural forms characterising the schools: a small rural P-12 school, a Bendigo P-10 school, two Bendigo 7-10 schools, 7-12 schools in the two towns, and two large VCE provider schools in Bendigo, one in the state system, and the other in the Catholic system. Contributing further to the distinctive culture of each school, is a tendency within this region for teachers to remain in the one school for extensive periods of time.

The participating schools were as follows. *The Senior Secondary College,* is exclusively a Year 11 and 12 school, the sole government VCE provider in Bendigo, and located in the centre of the city. It is also the largest government VCE provider in Victoria, with an enrolment of 1,840 in the year 2000. *College A* (Years 7-10) is the largest of the four junior secondary colleges in Bendigo, has more than 1,000 students and draws its students from the southern side of the city, and from a wide rural hinterland belt as far distant as the 50 kilometres distant town of Heathcote. Demographically, some of this college's urban catchment areas are essentially middle class. In contrast, *College B* lies in a suburb on the northern side of Bendigo and according to late 1990s ABS data, a suburb which had one of the lowest levels of average household income in Victoria. The fourth government secondary school, *College C,* in 1999 became Bendigo's first P-10 school, following the amalgamation of an existing secondary school with one of its feeder primary schools. This school serves Bendigo's northeast urban sweep and its surrounding rural areas. The final participating Bendigo School was *the Catholic College,* with an enrolment of approximately 1,600. It has two campus locations seven kilometres apart, and is structurally divided on a Year 7- 9 and Year 10-12 basis.

College D, a P-12 school with a total enrolment of 300, is 45 minutes travelling time north of Bendigo, a school located in the sheep grazing plains, a school without a town, a service school to the surrounding farming community. The two regional towns, Castlemaine and Maryborough each have one government secondary school. In terms of socio-economic indicators, both these towns are demonstrably disadvantaged. For example, a demographic study undertaken by Vinson (1999), of Victoria's 622 postcode areas, ranked each of these towns relatively high on nine indicators of locational disadvantage[7]. Both *College F* and *College G* are Year 7-12 schools, serving their towns and extensive rural hinterlands.

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[7] Vinson T. (1999) *Unequal in life: The distribution of social disadvantage in Victoria and NSW.* The Ignatius Centre, Jesuit Social Services, Melbourne. The nine measures of social disadvantage included: the number of unemployed persons as a percentage of the labour force; the number of long term unemployed as a proportion of the population, the proportion of households with low income; the proportion of persons who had left school before the age of 15; the proportion of unskilled workers as a proportion of the adult population 18-65; the number of Court convictions as a proportion of the population; the number of confirmed cases of child abuse; and the number of psychiatric hospital admissions.

One of the common features of staffing at most of the participating schools in this region, is that many teachers have long associations with the schools they teach in, associations often augmented by the fact that teachers' own children have attended, or indeed still attend, these schools. This heightens the sense of 'school in community' within this region, working to advantage the implementation of the FSS program.

The Full Service Schools Program in the Bendigo Program Area: Case Management Approaches

While each school took a school-community-specific orientation to the FSS Program, the regional coordinating role was assumed through a School Principals' Advisor (a senior educational manager), based at DEET's Regional Office in Bendigo. The FSS Program Area Network Committee's regular bi-monthly forums thus became the main vehicle for exchange of ideas on the different ways the FSS Program was being implemented. The meetings provided participants with periodic up-dating of information about the FSS Program, and an opportunity to learn how other schools were addressing what are, essentially, an educationally pervasive set of concerns in contemporary schooling.

What was common across the participating schools in this region was their agreement that a case management approach would be the most effective use of FSS money in this region. Each school agreed to work within this framework, and develop ways of implementing the FSS program that were congruent with, and perhaps unique, to the communities they served. In broad terms, this case management approach had the following four features, with all schools developing programs which included several or all of these features (below).

1. The improvement of curriculum offerings in the middle years of secondary schooling

Some teacher representatives in the FSS Program expressed the view that young people's transition from school has traditionally been, in the minds of most secondary school teachers, a marginal issue, particularly so for early school leavers and those disenchanted by normal school programs. A number of schools sought to address this problem by improving their curriculum provision for disengaged students and those identified as being at risk of early school leaving. And this was essentially undertaken within a case management framework in ways which provided improved scope for student subject choice, in ways which allowed for improved interactive potentials between teachers and students, or in ways which made more real, the world of post-schooling employment, education or training to students.

Thus in one school, the Year 10 program was re-organised into a more flexible vocational pathways format, specifically encouraging students to explore post schooling pathways, and to follow their interests. In another school, a teacher was employed part-time with a specific brief to provide programs for at risk students

in small groups, programs designed with a strong relationship focus but which also sought to focus on foundation English and Mathematics skills. This school, like a number of others sought to make their curriculum fun and practically based. As one teacher noted, when students are given the responsibility to develop an order for the materials required for a hot house to propagate plants, and then have the task of actually constructing it, the Maths involved has some complexity for many Year 9 students, as well as providing them with motivation and a sense of achievement.

In a third school, Student Enterprise Teams were established with Year 10 students. Each team of three students was assisted in developing both business plans and marketing strategies in furniture making. Over a period of six months, the teams worked together to mass produce a marketable item which they could sell, and with an incentive that the teams would share the profits after meeting the basic costs. This program was a regular part of the curriculum, though available only to identified at risk students. After some initial reluctance to be involved in this program, participating students became enthusiastic about it, and some reported it to be the most worthwhile subject in their Year 10 schooling. Others indicated that their participation in the Student Enterprise Teams was the primary reason they had remained at school throughout Year 10, and/or had provided them with sufficient motivation or confidence to attempt Year 11[8].

2. A closer following-through over time of individual students deemed to be 'at risk'

In different and diverse ways, FSS Program school representatives reported their efforts to improve tracking processes with their students while still at school, but also once students had left the school.

One 7-10 school for example, undertook a thorough investigation of the associated aspects of students with poor school attendance patterns and, in a separate initiative, sought to improve the audits on students' destinations following their leaving school. As part of it, supporting students seeking employment agendas, and noting the bias in many pre-apprenticeship programs towards males, another Bendigo 7-10 sought to specifically identify and assist female students at risk. The school, with external agency support, then developed 'tailor-made' programs for their identified students, and also sought to improve the tracking of Year 10 exit students.

A third school provided several brief illustrations of how important the links between schools and other agencies needs to be around matters of transition from school, and how critical and timely assistance to individual young people can facilitate positive outcomes. In the three examples provided, it is useful to speculate on what might have transpired in each case, had such timely assistance not been available.

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[8] This finding was supported by the school's evaluation processes with these students in relation to this program.

Sue[9] transferred to a regional town having just completed Year 10 in 1998 at a Melbourne school, but her poor adjustment to the new environment, and to her Year 11 studies, resulted in her dropping out of school by March of 1999. Subsequently assisted through the FSS Program, she soon after enrolled in off-campus studies in two Year 11 subjects within the town, and applied herself well in a more flexible learning environment. Meanwhile she was encouraged to develop her demonstrable leadership qualities in a drug and alcohol peer education program. Following her successes in her Year 11 studies in 1999, she continued her VCE studies off-campus in 2000, while at the same time she was completing a retail course with TAFE.

Ian, with a long history of respiratory illness in his school years, had undertaken his Year 9 studies by distance education. Returning to school in Year 10, Ian's indifferent behaviour and poor motivation in school resulted in him being ' encouraged' to leave. Through the FSS Program network in his community, he was encouraged to pursue his interest in building. A work placement was obtained for him through a local business network agency, but this ended on an unsatisfactory note following a disagreement between Ian and another youth at the work location. Subsequently he was accepted into a TAFE vouchers building construction course, but his irregular attendances and erratic behaviour resulted in this being short-lived. Around this time Ian had come under the jurisdiction of juvenile justice following some Court charges. Through the FSS Program, Ian was able to gain the additional support and advocacy he sorely needed at this time. He was offered another opportunity to complete the TAFE Building Construction course, and this time completed it successfully. His self-esteem and confidence rose, and among the future options he is considering is returning to school to complete the VCE.

It was not surprising that following her chronic absence pattern from school for some months, *Kate* resolutely decided to leave school on turning 15, mid-year in 1999. Counselling this student to return to school proved fruitless, but FSS Program involvement with her alerted the counsellor to the not inconsiderable peer approval for Kate's actions among some students still at school, with some aspiring to elect a similar pathway. This realisation led to the establishment of a short off-campus course for 15 and 16 year old girls, an initiative fully supported by the local school. Though Kate's attendance in this course was not regular, with support from home she did complete the reading, writing and communication modules, and the case manager's growing insights into Kate's interests in animals resulted in a work placement for her being obtained at the Healesville Sanctuary. Throughout 2000, she has continued to be actively engaged, mainly through TAFE programs, and though small group programs in the community learning centre. Kate is currently completing a communication course which will have as an outcome the production of a youth magazine.

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[9] To ensure anonymity, the names of students have been changed, together with some minor contextual detail.

3. Utilising appropriate locally based expertise in community agencies outside the school system

Teachers from the participating schools consistently reported having gained a better understanding of a range of outside human services agencies which have some capacity to support the school in its work with young people: particularly in relation to encouraging young people to continue their education to Year 12 and to their transition from school. Thus individual schools established mutually beneficial relationships with local employment agencies, with community health centres, TAFE colleges, or with other agencies as appropriate to their identified students. In some cases this meant utilising external staff in existing or new school programs on the school site or in the community.

The Senior Secondary College used some of its FSS Program funding to further develop a part-time schooling, part-time employment transition program for approximately 30 students. The outsourced services of an employment agency were deployed in a training program for these young people, a program which included components on self-esteem, employer expectations, workplace behaviour, and the exploration of career options and pathways. Another program auspiced by this agency to the same school focused on communication skills, offering a combined emphasis on literacy and the better managing of work requirements. This program was tailor-made to meet the needs of the particular student group.

One Bendigo 7-10 school effectively used university students as mentors to their students, mentors who were matched with students on the basis of a common shared interest. The teacher from this school reported,

> *I used to have (a student) in class and you'd look at his book and it's covered with little graphics and stuff like that. Anyway, he loved meeting this guy from the university who was into the same sort of stuff*[10].

For *College D* (P-12), where geographical isolation presents accessibility problems of many kinds for students (and for staff), the FSS Program created the opportunity for the school to develop some improved and more systematic linkages with the counselling social worker from a community health centre, in a 30 km. distant Inglewood.

A key feature of the *College F* FSS Program was the appointment of a coordinating case manager located in a community centre away from the school. This case manager, employed on a part-time basis, worked closely with the Assistant Principal and teachers at the Regional Secondary College and with government and community agencies in the town, including TAFE and Centrelink. However, a critical element in this program, again reflecting a case management approach, was the personal relationship the case manager-community worker was able to provide for between some 40 and 50 young people at risk (some who were still at school, some early school leavers), and the linkages she was able to generate for these young people though her network of employment, pre-employment and

[10] From a report to the LCM Area Network Meeting, Bendigo, 11 September, 2000.

community services contacts in the town. The case manager also ran after-school small group tutoring programs, after-school study programs, while also providing vocational directions to individuals based on her knowledge of their particular skills and interests.

The author's discussions with students associated with the *College F* FSS Program provided testimony to the effectiveness of this approach in this community. Students volunteered that their involvement in these programs had provided them with a number of benefits: it had encouraged them to stay in school; they believed they learned some important skills including how to structure their time better; they believed they had learned more about the world of post-school employment and work; and some of the programs had proved to be for them, perhaps unexpectedly, a lot of fun.

4. Making students more personally aware of the range of local community health and employment service agencies from which they can access different forms of assistance.

Typically, this meant creating circumstances through programs or through more informal contact) for young people to meet with non-school agency personnel, in their school or through visiting locations. A number of schools used staff from JPP to better assist young peoples' understandings about required skills across a range of industries, including the areas of business administration and hospitality. For *College G*, this meant the inclusion of staff from the town's community health centre in the school's programs[11] . The *Catholic College* deployed a case manager from an employment agency, to establish an employment experience bridge for a small group of their identified 'at risk' Year 9 students, some of whom had recognised disabilities. Part of this program included the provision of supervised work experience for these young people in the La Trobe University library.

Some Concluding Thoughts

The FSS Program in this Area has allowed schools to improve what they currently do, or undertake new initiatives. Transition from school has traditionally been seen by secondary teachers as an 'add-on', not as a central feature of mainstream curriculum programs. Schools have reported that the FSS Program has contributed towards a shift away from this perception, among teachers in their schools. Having funding made available specifically to focus on early school leaving has generally increased teachers' acceptance of the need for alternative pathways for students[12] .

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[11] In the words of the Castlemaine FSS teacher,

... we make sure the kids know what they're about, what help they can get from them (local agencies). We take the kids down to the premises and they spend a couple of days interacting with the staff, and finding out what sort of support they provide.

[12] That growing realisation is steadily being reinforced in this State by the publication of the Ministerial Review of Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways In Victoria (August, 2000).

Several Area Network representatives commented, however, on the need to work strategically towards changing school cultures in this regard. They reported that subject teachers have needed to be persuaded that the involvement of one of more of their students in a special program, necessitating absence from their regular subject class once a week, is a legitimate curriculum option, and further, probably requires different forms of assessment of such students. Some schools have sought to increase staff acceptance by making programs for students at risk highly visible, so that staff can see the successes and benefits for both the students and the school. One teacher commented on a school grounds project undertaken by a group of its students near the front entrance to the school. Teachers and other students see this school enhancement project daily, and it puts the focus back on those who completed it. Teachers then see these students as putting something back into their school.

Teacher reports suggest that through the FSS Program, wider community resources are being used more effectively, and there is a growing realisation among teachers that programs can be developed through joint school-community agency collaboration, which target particular markets of young people. For example, in Bendigo, one agency has been providing a business administration course for a group of selected students at one school, while at another school with a different target group, the same agency has developed a food handling course.

The process of tracking students beyond school is time-consuming, and schools currently don't have adequate resources, in terms of personnel and funds, to do this adequately. This regional group saw some value in having a person or an agency specifically assuming responsibility for transition issues and processes with schools across a school district. This would involve this person or agency maintaining close liaison with all schools, with employers, with post-school training agencies, and with other community agencies. It is perhaps not surprising that in a region where schools individually adopted a case management approach to the FSS Program, and where new processes both within and outside these schools were developed, with some impressive outcomes being achieved, that there seemed to be a general endorsement among the Area Network representatives that a wider 'case management approach' to improving transition from schooling for young people was worthy of most serious consideration.

Acknowledgements

The assistance of representatives from school communities at the FSS Program Area Network Committee meetings towards the preparation of this paper is gratefully acknowledged. In addition, the additional assistance of FSS Program staff and students in Maryborough is noted.

LEARNING RELATIONSHIPS: ENGAGEMENT FOR EFFECTIVE LEARNING

FSS Program Case Study: Brimbank/Hume Network

The Focus: Collaborative development of a model of Full Service Schooling that increases the engagement of students in learning.

A team of teachers from both Catholic and Government secondary schools in the Brimbank/Hume Full Service Schools Network collaborated on a small research project to investigate how effective their FSS projects are in leading to greater engagement in learning. They were also keen to establish how classroom teachers might best be supported in helping students learn more effectively. Their research focused on two programs: the first involved three schools and a TAFE Institute providing a common program for Year 10 students; the second involved the part-time employment of a youth worker.

The Author: Gerard Stafford

Projects Studied

There were effectively two different projects operating within the three schools involved in the action-research evaluation. Two of the schools, both medium-sized and located in the north-western suburbs, participated in a common program whereby groups of Year 10 students who were seen to be at risk of not completing secondary education were invited to participate in a one-day-per-week program at a TAFE institute, where they could participate in a variety of classes not offered within their own schools. The intentions of this program were to enliven their interest in learning; to provide ongoing counselling and support; to give them a taste of options in further study and training; and to provide extended work placements where appropriate.

In the third school, a relatively small inner-suburban secondary college, the program involved the part-time employment of a youth worker, with the intention of extending an existing program aimed at supporting young people with a range of personal needs and thus strengthening their connectedness with their school.

The Action Research Team

The Action Research Team for the Brimbank/Hume FSS Evaluation comprised five members. They included the Action Research Facilitator, a seconded secondary principal (currently employed as a Resource Officer for the Brigidine Secondary Schools' Council); a Secondary College Liaison Coordinator at a TAFE institute;

and three FSS Coordinators from secondary colleges (two government, one Catholic).

The Action Research Processes

The team met on four occasions. After each meeting minutes were constructed, quite deliberately, to be a quite comprehensive record of our discussion together, so as to provide data which could be used by Team members in their daily work, and in this case study.

At the first meeting we explored the concept of action research in a school setting (see Attachment A). The Team agreed to a set of informing principles that would guide our work together, with the following four principles being of particular importance:

- *Practitioners will have particular insights and wisdom gained through their daily practice – insights and wisdom which need to be built into the research plan from the outset. This means that practitioners can be confident that their intentions and experience are to be respected at all times.*
- *Practitioners will contribute insights more fully, and welcome research findings more wholeheartedly, if a consensus democratic approach is adopted throughout the research cycle of planning, interpreting and recommending. This means that all participants in the research cycle have an equal say in the decisions about what is to be researched, in what manner, and how the research findings will be used. Consensus, rather than majority rule, will inform decisions about the release of research data.*
- *Evaluation in this context should be a process of assisting the practitioner to make better decisions about their practice, including allocation of resources. Evaluation should also assist policy makers to make more informed decisions regarding ways in which practitioners might be more effectively supported to implement mutually agreed changes.*
- *Action Research evaluation should therefore provide direct benefit to practitioners, and not just contribute to a wider pool of collective academic wisdom or material typically required by policy makers. The 'Research' component of Action Research enables practitioners and researchers alike to become clearer about the next steps to take – the next 'Action'.*

Adopting these principles meant that we would be mindful of finding ways to make immediate practical use of the data we collected, as we were hopeful that our insights and discoveries could and would lead to improved practices in each of the participating schools, as well as useful pointers for other schools and policy-makers.

The Team operated at all times on a consensus model of decision-making and established a warm and friendly operating climate from the outset. It was always a pleasure to meet together!

Focus and purposes of the action research

The Team agreed that members would each complete answers addressed to the 'key evaluation questions' suggested by the State Evaluation Team. We also had some general discussion around the implementation of 'Full Service' programs in schools. In what was to become a recurring theme in our work, we identified the importance of pastoral care:

> *In the light of such family circumstances, all agreed on the pivotal importance of effective pastoral care programs in schools. After their families, schools are possibly the next most significant institution in the lives of young people. Schools can be places where the young person is known and cared for, and where they can be encouraged to re-connect, or stay connected to the broader community through programs and courses which enable them to build their confidence, their sense of self-worth, and their belief in their own futures.*

We also discussed some of the factors which can militate against our attempt to connect our young people to schooling. Such factors, we felt, included the following:

> *Programs which lack clarity of intentions, which haven't been thought through well enough, and which don't have effective funding built in to sustain them; the boring, irrelevant nature of the curriculum, particularly at Years 9-10; the narrowness of definitions of success, particularly where success is equated solely with completion of the VCE; the lack of experience of some TAFE teachers in working with secondary students; the difficulty of balancing our hope to attract back to school kids who have 'dropped out' against the fear by some within the school that such students will 'give the school a bad name'; the lack of support and services available to assist young people to 'navigate' their way in an often confusing, piecemeal landscape of programs and pathways; the unsuitability of some learning environments which are set up as 'adult' in orientation, ignoring the need for pastoral care that young people need right through to their early twenties.*

In this broad-ranging discussion we were in fact trying to narrow down the focus of our action-research work together, endeavouring to discern the most critical issue. Following this discussion I devised the Action Research Plan, which the Team endorsed at its second meeting. The plan identified 'engagement of students for effective learning' as the critically important focus area for our work:

> *We singled this out as the critically important focus area. We are most interested in developing programs and practices which increase the engagement of students in authentic learning experiences (that is: experiences, programs and activities which increase the interest of at risk young people in actually completing their education, and which lead on to improvements in the skills and life chances of the young people themselves.)*
>
> *Are the FSS projects represented here actually leading to greater engagement in learning? If so, how can we keep this momentum going? If not, what is needed to achieve such results?*

This is our focus, and whilst it will no doubt lead us to consider a range of related factors such as funding; administrative supports required; implications for professional development; pastoral approaches; school structures and climate, etc., our major interest is in the teacher in the classroom and how she/he might best be supported in helping kids learn best.

Following this the Team devised together a list of questions which I would use when interviewing students at the three schools represented. These questions were aimed at exploring various dimensions of our focus on 'engagement for effective learning':

> *Our interest as an action research team is to identify the ingredients/ strategies that lead to kids themselves feeling that they are learning something they didn't know before; that they are more interested in being in a learning situation; and more insightful about their learning. We want to find out how we can better construct situations in and around schools whereby kids who might otherwise be disengaged actually make more effective connections with their schools, and actually start to see themselves in a longer-term relationship with learning. We want to find out how we can help kids, especially those most 'at risk' of dropping out, to begin to construct a future for themselves, and to begin to regain a view of learning as something which is for them, as well as others!*

Methods of Data Collection Used

In addition to the data contained in the minutes of our four meetings, I interviewed small groups of students at each of the three schools, and interviewed the principals at each of the three schools as well.

The process for the interviews was that, after the Team had developed the agreed list of questions, the member from each school arranged for me to meet with a small group of students (6-8), and also their principal. I interviewed each group, developed a written record of the interview, and sent it back to the Team member so that the students and principals could check and, if necessary, amend my written record of their responses. Following this process, the endorsed interview records were then tabled at the third meeting of the Action Research Team.

In all, I conducted six interviews, with the three principals and three groups of students respectively. Each interview was for 40-50 minutes duration.

Evaluation Data

At our second meeting we talked at length about the kinds of programs and practices which might best cater for the needs of 'at risk' students. The ideas shared included the following:

- *With at risk kids the biggest need is to get them connected to the school, so that they actually attend. Such connections are with one or two teachers, as part of the school's overall pastoral strategy.*

- *Giving kids time is another obvious, but critical need. This includes time to sit down with each young person and work out a 'pathways plan' with them, identifying goals and hopes and working back from that. Such a plan should be annually reviewed with the young person.*

- *Developing a flexible timetable is important, so that different arrangements for learning can be facilitated.*

- *Valuing different kinds of learning: it is important to look for ways in which all kinds of learning and achievement might be valued, for example 'if I've learned to manage my anger, that needs to be recognized as important learning; if I've been part of a particular individual or group program, that needs to be recognized as valuable.'*

- *Adequate staffing: in order to cater for the needs of at risk kids particularly, there is an obvious need for more staff, so that kids can get the time and the support they need in order to develop, for example, individual learning programs.*

- *Follow up of exit students: There is a need for schools to exercise much more ownership of their students once they leave school, by following up their destinations, but also by establishing good links with JPP, passing on files about the student's needs and interests, etc.*

- *Suitability of curriculum: concerns were expressed that school curriculum can often be too narrowly focussed, and subject advice to kids was sometimes too narrow as well, for example: kids being advised to do double Maths, and then limiting other options. It was recognized, however, that all kids should be given access to developing mathematical reasoning skills, and Maths for real-life applications. The Whittlesea retail training program and horticulture were cited as excellent examples of how Mathematics can be positively integrated into valuable and valued learning programs.*

- *Teacher-training: Concerns were expressed that there may not be enough focus on pastoral needs of at risk kids within teacher-training courses. Student teachers need to get in touch with the reality of kids today. They need also to have the experience of working with core teams of teachers, who work together with common expectations, common ways of being with kids.*

Through the process of the interviews a number of themes became evident – these were common threads throughout the comments of students and principals, and through the perceptions shared by the Team members themselves.

The records of the interviews reveal a consistent set of views and experiences which, taken together, might construct a picture of effective learning, and how to encourage this. As one of the principals said, when talking about pastoral care and welfare of students:

It's bigger than pastoral care – it's about learning relationships.

Building on this insight, I have constructed a diagram (Attachment 2) to help draw together the insights and views which were offered during the interviews.

Recommendations for the Projects and Schools

- JPP: very positive comments about this program and how helpful it is, although the tendering process makes it difficult for schools. In 12 months positive relationships are developed between providers and students; but when personnel change this creates difficulties for school staff in terms of continuing the positive relationships. The JPP allocations to regions don't match the actual locations of schools. The process of working collaboratively with schools is a positive change from the previous distance between the former CES and the school.
- Co-location: it would be a good idea for the JPP person to be at the school, even for a day per week.
- Administration of the FSS Program: frustration was expressed with the lack of direction, and the limited attempts to put structures in place which would guide and support schools. Concerns were raised about the schools who were not part of the FSS Program. How do people get to know what's around? Frustration, as well, with the location of the meetings at Footscray – at 4.00pm it's very hard for classroom teachers to get to the meetings from their schools. Frustration at the changing nature of funding and programs, leaving teachers on a 'continual learning curve', trying to understand new programs; feeling that this is about 'keeping the troops on edge all the time'. 'It's difficult enough working with these kids without things changing all the time'. Need to acknowledge the experts, the people who work with the kids.
- Funding: it is strongly suggested that funding be increased for each school so that as part of their global budget schools can properly cater to the needs of at risk kids. There needs to be a recognition that there will always be at risk kids and schools will always need additional funds to support such kids. We do not need any more 'pilot' programs, projects or schemes: we need decent reliable funding so that all schools can provide justice for these students.
- Benefits of collaborative projects: the collaboration between the action research team's schools, for example, or between schools and JPP were seen to be very positive and helpful, and will be continued, somehow, despite the lack of funds.
- Teachers sharing ideas: there is a great need for time to be built in so that teachers can interact, and share approaches and experiences. Currently such sharing is done with people who are already overloaded, and schemes such as FSS are perhaps over-reliant on people who are already committed...how do we extend beyond this nucleus of people?

- Need for change of school cultures: People experience difficulties with colleagues: people 'being precious about kids missing out on what the teacher wants to do', when kids are attending external courses, etc. Schools do need to change and recognize that learning can take place in all kinds of ways, not just in the classroom. Yet schools are under pressure when the Annual Report is published, comparing 'like schools'. The criteria for judging schools need to be re-examined: for example one school in the region appears to have only 45% retention to Year 12, yet most kids who have left are being trained, or facilitated into work. The post compulsory years need real reform; there needs to be much more flexibility at Year 10, with less of a 'VCE-driven' approach.

- Concerns from TAFE: some at TAFE (those who organize programs with schools) are disappointed with the paths of communication from schools regarding student outcomes. There is a need for schools to do more forward planning prior to their students entering link courses at TAFE, for example: more horizon-broadening experience before the students begin the OWE course in Term 3, so that kids know what to expect, and can gain most from the experience. From the schools' perspective, there is already an enormous amount of work in preparing, setting up, administering and auditing.

- Difficulties with work placements: concern was expressed that in certain key work areas employers are not open to taking kids on work placements (e.g: Graphic Design, Information Technology, places like Sanity Records). There is a need to provide incentives to particular areas of industry to encourage them to do this.

- Support of the Principal: the need for the Principal to be supportive of programs for at risk students was recognized as crucial.

- Changing school climates: there is a need for discussion about effective learning. Staff who work with at risk students experience resistance from other staff...is this because there is not a climate within the school of discussing effective learning? To change this, there needs to be time for teachers to be 're-generated about what is good teaching and learning'.

- Special support for smaller schools: there is a need for more smaller schools, who can provide specialized support to young people who experience difficulties in 'mainstream schooling' and who are 'at risk'. Such schools must be given special funding, extra support, beyond the normal allocations, as part of their global budgets.

- Certification for students: students should receive certification which recognizes what kids have achieved, in all the courses and programs in which they are involved. This is about valuing young people; keeping them connected to the school. 'Kids don't drop out of school, they leave school', and perhaps one of the reasons is that their achievements are not formally recognized.

Experiences, learning and outcomes from the action research process

Members of the team offered very positive comments about their engagement, and many of their comments are recorded below:

A luxury to be able to reflect on one's work.

So pleased to have done this (been part of the action research) – so invaluable to hear what others are doing.

The sharing of ideas was invaluable. It was great to be able to take away fantastic things you had learned at the meetings, and from the research.

Made me realise the common element that exists across all of our school systems – the creation of learning partnerships.

After the meetings, going back to school and saying: hang on – there are better ways to do this, or this is not what should be happening.

We all think the same way (on the team) about working with the most vulnerable, yet back at school you've still really got to battle with some people...

Reporting back at school about some of our discussions has raised some eyebrows, yet allowed teachers to see teaching a little differently, and make some allowances, be more attuned to the needs of our kids.

Helped me focus again on the need to find ways to operate more flexibly with our kids, particularly in the areas of assessment and reporting.

Actually I feel quite humbled when I read through what my principal and our kids said: I already knew this, yet it brought things into fresher focus, reminded me of what great things we're doing, despite the daily humdrum of school life.

The interviews with the students were very significant: the process of talking with them made them feel more important, made them feel that they were being listened to and having an impact on their programs.

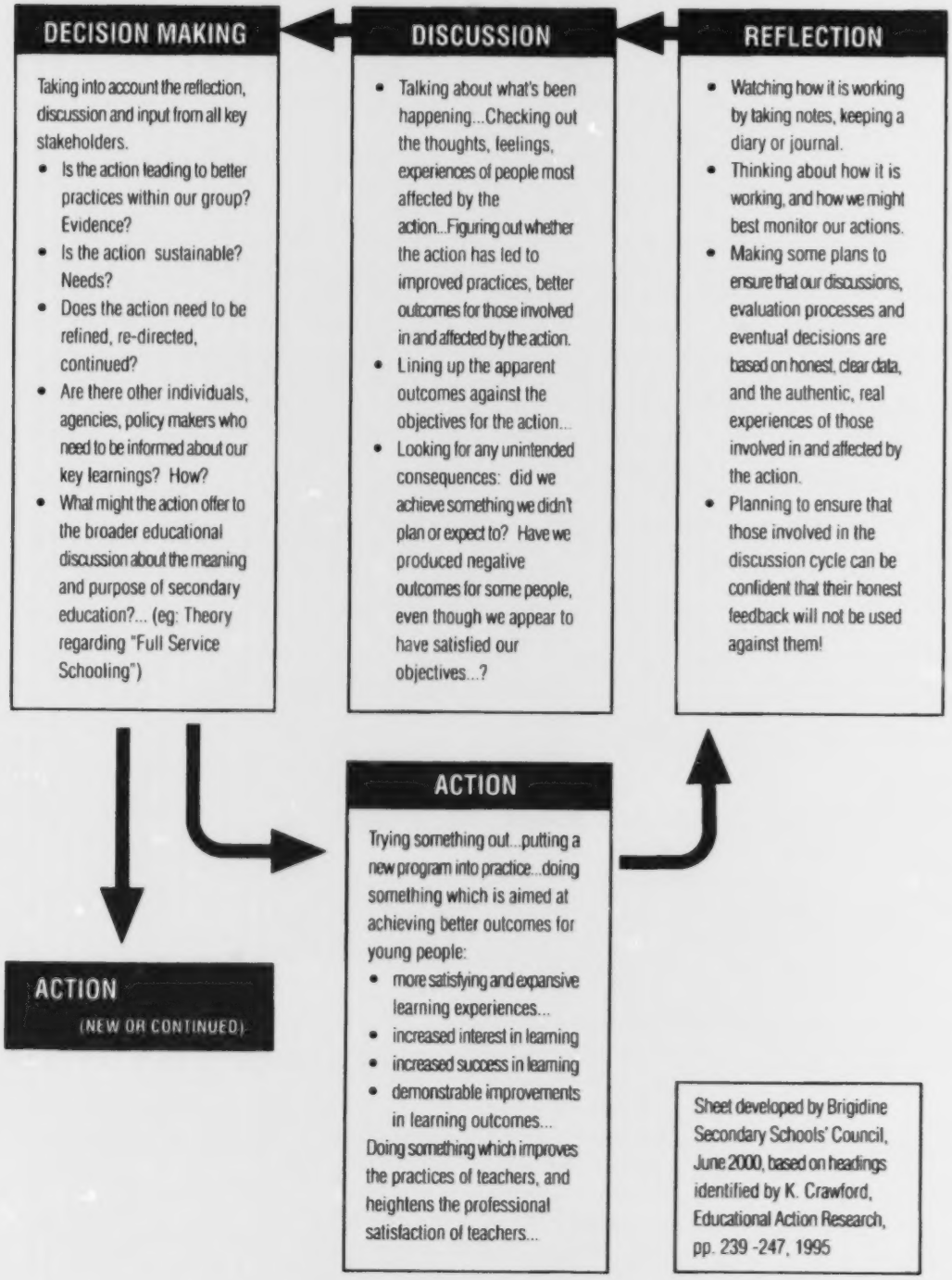
Members of the team were very positive about the action-research model. They felt that a most valuable part of the process was the interviews with the students, and it was felt that they would like students to continue to be a major part of such a process. Student interviews helped identify successes and also areas for improvement; they kept teachers focused on student needs, and also let students know that they have contributed towards the improvements of their program. A particularly important feature of the student interview process was someone from outside the school coming in and listening to the students, conducting the research. Perhaps this pointed to an ongoing role for personnel from the Department's regional offices.

Overall it was felt that somehow the work of the team should continue:

...teamwork should continue, to enable sharing of ideas and comparing of strategies. The cross-sectoral connections (between Catholic and government schools) we have established, have also been very valuable.

Attachment A

The Action Research Cycle in a School Setting


DECISION MAKING
Taking into account the reflection, discussion and input from all key stakeholders.
• Is the action leading to better practices within our group? Evidence?
• Is the action sustainable? Needs?
• Does the action need to be refined, re-directed, continued?
• Are there other individuals, agencies, policy makers who need to be informed about our key learnings? How?
• What might the action offer to the broader educational discussion about the meaning and purpose of secondary education?... (eg: Theory regarding "Full Service Schooling")
DISCUSSION
• Talking about what's been happening...Checking out the thoughts, feelings, experiences of people most affected by the action...Figuring out whether the action has led to improved practices, better outcomes for those involved in and affected by the action.
• Lining up the apparent outcomes against the objectives for the action...
• Looking for any unintended consequences: did we achieve something we didn't plan or expect to? Have we produced negative outcomes for some people, even though we appear to have satisfied our objectives...?
REFLECTION
• Watching how it is working by taking notes, keeping a diary or journal.
• Thinking about how it is working, and how we might best monitor our actions.
• Making some plans to ensure that our discussions, evaluation processes and eventual decisions are based on honest, clear data, and the authentic, real experiences of those involved in and affected by the action.
• Planning to ensure that those involved in the discussion cycle can be confident that their honest feedback will not be used against them!
ACTION
Trying something out...putting a new program into practice...doing something which is aimed at achieving better outcomes for young people:
• more satisfying and expansive learning experiences...
• increased interest in learning
• increased success in learning
• demonstrable improvements in learning outcomes...
Doing something which improves the practices of teachers, and heightens the professional satisfaction of teachers...
ACTION
(NEW OR CONTINUED)

Sheet developed by Brigidine Secondary Schools' Council, June 2000, based on headings identified by K. Crawford, Educational Action Research, pp. 239 -247, 1995

Learning Relationships – Full Service Schooling

Building healthy relationships...

- Each young person is known, valued and cared for...
- Staff are valued and included, and thus have a stake in the place...
- Our ways of operating are inclusive, open, fair and welcoming...
- Trust and responsible freedom are the cornerstones of our interactions.

Ensuring that good teaching and learning is taking place within all programs and activities.

- What happens is well-planned and collaboratively developed...
- The program assists each learner to develop a better sense of their talents, and areas for improvement...
- The teaching/learning program is helping each young person to understand and build upon their strengths as learners...

Understanding the needs of adolescents

- Valuing individual differences and uniqueness..
- Being mentors and guides in the search for who we can be, as women and men...
- Gradually opening up an understanding of life as it is, and life as it could be...
- Recognizing and celebrating achievements and discoveries, big and small...
- Re-affirming a sense of hope and wonder about the world and our place within it...

Taking particular care of the most vulnerable

- Building a culture of inter-connectedness...
- Helping families to work better...
- Exploring links and connections with groups and agencies outside of the school...
- Exploring and teaching the meaning of care and forgiveness...

All of the above as an expression of the effective learning pedagogy of a full service school

- Learning needs to be tailored to each student's interests and abilities (ie: it's RELEVANT)
- Engagement will be heightened if the student has some say or choice in what they learn (ie: it's DEMOCRATICALLY STRUCTURED)
- Direct assistance, on a one-to-one basis, is a vital component of successful engagement in a learning task (ie: it's PROPERLY RESOURCED)
- Young people, particularly when they encounter personal challenges and turmoil, need authentic and ongoing personal support in order to stay engaged in learning (ie: it's delivered in a PASTORAL, CARING CONTEXT)
- Young people will come to love and respect their school if they find it to be a place which genuinely engages in their whole life, which takes them as they are, and which freely offers them supports which can enable them to succeed in their learning (ie: the school is a HUMAN COMMUNITY, as well as being a learning community)
- As the young person grows and matures, the program needs to satisfy the individual's need to be treated as a young adult, to be trusted as adults would be trusted, and to have greater personal freedom and choice... (ie: it is teaching about FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY)
- The teaching program provides opportunities for new learnigs to be explored in a co-operative, open and kind climate (ie: it is mindful of building SELF-ESTEEM AND SELF-CONFIDENCE)
- The learning program provides access to activities and tasks which are convincingly relevant and which will clearly increase future options (ie: it's TRANSPARENTLY FUTURE-ORIENTED)

TEACHERS RESEARCHING TEACHERS: A CROSS-SCHOOL APPROACH TO MORE EFFECTIVE CURRICULUM FOR AT RISK STUDENTS

FSS Program Case Study: Casey/Dandenong Network

The Focus: student satisfaction with alternative programs in relation to their career and employment pathways and the impact of these programs on student retention and/or assistance into an employment option of their choice.

A team of teachers from the Casey/Dandenong Full Service Schools Network conducted a small research project to gain clearer directions for regional and school provision of programs for potential early school leavers. The programs they studied were established with Full Service Schools (FSS) funding. These were a Vocational Education Program and an Exploring Career Pathways Program. Both programs were initiated in response to students in Years 9 and 10 who were not engaging with school or who had low success rates in traditional academic subjects. Members of the team actively supported other schools in the region to implement FSS programs.

The Author: Barbara Fairweather

The Vocational Education Program

The Vocational Education Program is offered to students in Years 9 and 10 who are deemed to be at risk of leaving school for various reasons. 'At risk' is often characterised by a high degree of absenteeism/truancy, regular disciplinary problems and low success in 'traditional' academic subjects at school. Students are selected via an interview process through consultation with coordinators, parents, teachers, and students. Group sizes vary from about 8 to 15 students.

The program focuses on individual student needs and interests. The aim of the program is to enable students to develop individual action plans and a record of achievement that will guide them towards appropriate further education and training. A key element of this program is student participation in a weekly work experience program (Wednesdays in 10 week blocks). In addition to this there is a flexible program offering job and life skills, resumé production, interview skills, literacy and numeracy, first aid, communication skills and community service. The students also complete a reduced number of mainstream school subjects. Classes also engage in other minor projects as a group, for example, minor business

ventures such as running a staff luncheon and making possum boxes. Students may be advised to apply for a program but it is finally their choice if a position is available.

Resources and support required for the 'Vocational Education' Program are as follows:

- Funding to maintain low student/staff ratio, supply support staff to track students, specialist staff for literacy, numeracy, and first aid.
- Contacts from within the community used for work experience opportunities.
- Close relationships with parents/coordinators.
- Links with Careers Coordinator and VET Coordinator used for vocational opportunities.
- Funding to subsidise the adventure /orientation camp at the beginning of the year.
- To obtain outcomes/performance measures for the Vocational Education Program:
- All students entering the program are 'tracked' even after leaving school.
- Individual records are maintained from work experiences that lead to casual, part-time or full-time employment.
- Records of student performance are used in 'traditional subjects'.
- Personal observations of each student's degree of self-esteem, confidence etc. are collated. The mentoring role of team members enables a close relationship to be established and an understanding of student characteristics and changes.

Exploring Career Pathways Project

The initial idea for the Exploring Career Pathways Project was established by the FSS Area Network Committee responsible for the allocation of funding to the various programs across the region. This project was aimed at students in Years 9 and 10 who were identified as being students at risk of not completing Year 12 or who were unable to identify any area of future career interest. The students were also identified on the basis of their level of interest at school and associated behaviours, for example, attendance, participation in class activities, level of self-esteem. The students involved were nominated by their Level Coordinators who had consulted with their homeroom teachers to identify the appropriateness of the students for their participation in the project.

The program operated on the basis that the students would have a work placement one day a week (Wednesday) for a term (10 weeks) in an industry area that they identified as being of interest to them. They were counselled by a Workplace Coordinator who was funded from the FSS Program and who arranged, where possible, a relevant employment option. Students nominated a range of industries/ positions, not all of which were practical or possible, for example, the age restriction for the Police Force.

The purpose of the students' involvement was to:

- assist them in developing an area/s of interest in terms of a future career;
- develop goals for their future study;
- develop awareness of the responsibilities of being a member of the workforce;
- assist in developing an improved level of self-esteem and confidence;
- provide them with opportunities to experience new environments where they would have to deal with people, particularly adults, with whom they did not have a pre-existing relationship;
- foster a sense of self-worth within the students; and
- assist in the future transition from school to work.

The Action Research Team

The Action Research (AR) team consisted of teachers from four schools in the region with the responsibility for the coordination of VETIS and FSS Programs at Years 9 and 10 for at risk students or other alternative programs within their schools. Other members of staff were also involved, including teachers involved in the delivery of programs, form teachers, careers and welfare coordinators, an assistant principal and year level coordinators.

Members of the team are actively involved in the FSS Program Area Network Committee. They had already established working relationships and communication processes to share information, provide a mechanism for feedback and share resources as appropriate. Members of the team also actively supported other schools in the region to implement FSS programs.

Discussion of strategies and data collection methods and all decisions and actions were reached by consensus. E-mail, meetings and the telephone were all used to communicate information and obtain requests for information from the AR team members, including meeting agendas, action minutes and draft survey questions for the focus groups and interviews.

Focus and Purpose of the Action Research Team

The action research team set out to establish levels of satisfaction and relevance of the FSS programs to students in relation to their career and employment pathways, and the impact these programs have had on student retention and/or assistance into an employment option of choice. They:

- investigated teacher practices, levels of success of the FSS programs and strategies/methods/curriculum content that require further improvement; and
- sought the views of parents of FSS students at each of the schools to determine their satisfaction and perceptions of the impact of the program on their children.

The team had also intended to investigate and benchmark other FSS Program projects outside the Area. However, this did not occur due to time constraints.

Methods of Data Collection Used

Student focus groups were conducted with four schools. The AR team prepared questions and the team facilitator conducted all focus groups. Each member of the AR team attended a focus group (not his or her own secondary college) as an observer of the process. An audiotape was used to record the focus groups[13].

- Teacher surveys were conducted in each of the schools. Two were audiotaped and the others were conducted as individual interviews by the AR team members and, in one case, the team facilitator. Prior to this the AR team had prepared a set of questions.
- The AR team members conducted parent surveys with the schools. Parents were randomly selected and interviewed by phone, using questions prepared by the AR team.

Evaluation Findings

The programs

Awareness raising of FSS programs for students, teachers and parents, and general interest in these students resulted in improved retention rates, attitudes and student destinations for employment and further education and training. A significant number of these students would have 'dropped out' of the system without the extra programs and specialised attention. An important aspect has been that they have actually achieved something. Homework support has been very important. One group of teachers explained why:

> *We could also be penalising kids with problems at home who can't get their work done.*
>
> *They haven't got space to go and do their work or they are bound to look after younger siblings. Parents are fighting; all sorts of issues, and it does penalise them that way.*
>
> *A lot of it is to do with organisation and diary and getting things signed.*
>
> *It works because ... it has been after school, like a club and it's the homework club. We have sat down and gone through the Maths homework, English homework, whatever, assignments and things like that, and because they have had that time and there have been people there to help them etc. they have actually started coming good within the parameters of the reward system in mainstream education.*

[13] Formal permission to audiotape the focus groups had been sought from students, parents and each school prior to each event. The team also observed research protocols of obtaining formal consent for students, parents and teachers to participate in their research.

Work experience was also a key component of these programs. Positive aspects of the work experience component of the programs were summarised by one student as:

> *Having a break from school work. It divides up the week easier so you get a day in the middle of the week instead of having to wait the whole week. So it makes it easier to concentrate and you are more motivated at school.*

Feedback from students on the 'Exploring Career Pathways' Program has been positive, although there were issues that arose which created problems during the program. For example, some students were not receiving any positive feedback from their involvement in the program to the point that one had to be withdrawn from it completely and, in another case, the student had to change to a more suitable employer and work placement. In the case of the student who was withdrawn from the program, it actually allowed the school to deal with a number of issues that had been evident in the student's behaviour, but had been seen by the student as the school 'picking' on her. With an independent person making similar observations, it allowed for a more positive level of counselling to take place.

Student feedback indicated a high level of parent support for their program. For example:

> *My Dad didn't have a lot of faith in the program but now thinks it's great that my marks are up and I am going out in the workforce on a Wednesday and doing different jobs.*

The feedback from the parents interviewed was positive, although there was concern from one parent about the work her daughter was missing at school. This perhaps reflected a lack of appreciation by the parent as to the reason for her daughter being involved in the program as she did not complete all the work when she was in the mainstream classes at school. One parent wanted the program to continue beyond the prescribed period of time as she felt that her daughter in Year 9 gained more from being in the work placement than she did from being at school. The Coordinator, when approached about this, felt that it was in the student's interest to return to the classroom full-time and to use further opportunities in Year 10 for workplace experience. This issue is yet to be fully resolved.

In general, the Level Coordinators were happy with the program as they felt that the feedback that the students received was positive and they gained a better appreciation of the workplace and what was required to participate in it. The level of students' self-confidence was generally higher. In one notable case, the level of attendance and interest in class activities improved significantly, where previously a variety of strategies had failed. It also provided a very strong career direction and pathway for this student.

Participation in the program gave the students a sense of 'feeling special', as it was not seen as a stigma to participate in but rather as something special for them. A student who was undertaking a work placement in childcare explained:

You gain knowledge of the workforce out there. You are touching peoples' lives with what you actually do, and it's really good because you can see that you are making a difference to someone.

The real value of the program to the students will not be assessable in the short-term. Teachers are hoping that it does improve their attitude towards the need for and value of education and training for their future and hence increase the retention of these students.

Other teachers were also quite flexible about the students' participation in the program although more could be done to integrate the students' experiences into their 'normal' schoolwork and life rather than as an 'ad hoc' extra activity. One FSS teacher commented:

In fact I would say that staff, by their lack of complaint, give approval because we would certainly hear from them. But I think staff understand, particularly in the area of student support, that they are pretty positive about it.

In this case, the school has a practice of some programs working in isolation and needs to develop a greater sense of shared ownership and participation to fully utilise these opportunities.

Teaching strategies

Teaching strategies that work focus on setting up structures and experiences that enable students to achieve and develop positive relationships with teachers. One teacher observed that some students were capable; they just did not hand in work to be assessed. A way to overcome this problem is to:

... set them specific tasks that focus on specific skills. They get that done and they get the credits for it.

Another teacher 'chopped time up into smaller fragments ... so there is not too much concentrating for any length of time'. This includes asking students to give their personal opinions or experiences to help make connections or brainstorming. Finally they might have to write something down but this is minimal. Some teachers felt that this was especially important for some boys. For example:

I think the organisational stuff isn't there with boys and so, for example, I make sure that I always collect the work at the end of the session because I know that I will probably never see it again. I also make sure that I give them work that they can complete within that session and rather than say give a project sheet with a number of tasks to do on it, I might just take one and give them the one to do for the session, collect that bit of it, give them the next one and so on until it is all done. Then put it all together and tell them that they have completed it, like a project. ... if they take it away I will never see it again and then their work is gone. I can't give them credit for it.

Students also need to feel confident that:

> *It's OK to make mistakes, it's OK not to know. ... they all* (need) *to feel comfortable enough to be able to say, 'Explain this Miss, I don't understand that word'.*

One teacher also felt that it was important for students to have a 'short, sharp win in the first few minutes of being in the classroom ... a question they can answer or a response they can give'. A secure learning environment from a social point of view was also thought to be important in relation to 'big issues' that the girls or boys might want to discuss without fear. Sometimes separating them creates a better atmosphere, otherwise teachers need to be skilled in reducing the shock value of disruptive behaviour and comments by careful 'word play'. Smaller class groups, for example, 10 students, assist students to build this confidence because teachers are able to provide extra attention and assistance.

Other teachers commented that at risk students generally do not have academic goals and interests. Therefore, literacy skills are more relevant to these students when learning them is put in the context of activities such as reading newspapers and interpreting occupational health and safety signs and Melway maps. At this point in their lives, these things are of greater interest than Chaucer or Shakespeare. One group of FSS coordinators felt that more value has to be put on literacy for practical use in the curriculum to engage these students. For example:

> *You give those same young people instructions to put together wheels on their skate board, engines in lawn mowers, whatever is going to capture their interest, they can do it. And they can read it and tell you about it.*

One teacher had had some success with motivating students to read by concentrating on text response activities that involved short stories, short passages with immediate follow-up comprehension. This helped to build up skills that students had missed out on.

Another example of practical curriculum was 'work mathematics' where students and their teacher went to work sites and talked to builders and bricklayers about how they work out the quantities of materials, for example, concrete, plasterboard, carpet, that they needed. The students would then work on particular problems to do with the specific site.

Some teachers felt that scheduling classes in blocks, for example, two consecutive half days, would assist students to build up particular skills and reduce the need for revision that needs to occur because they have forgotten everything from the previous week.

Teachers also felt strongly about schools giving students the message that they valued alternative programs by providing appropriate classrooms. For example, timetabling English in the photography room or the textiles room means there are unnecessary distractions that make teaching and learning even more difficult.

Finally, teacher flexibility and positive role modelling is crucial. One teacher explained that classes are convivial and 'more like the real world'. This means seating arrangements are flexible and students are encouraged to discuss off-task subjects 'while simultaneously doing their Maths'. Circulating around the students was also important to 'get the feel of the attention span and have something else for them to do when it has reached its end', for example, having a group discussion about 'how many Big Macs is it from here to Sydney?'

A teacher from another school worked on 'changing behaviour through modelling'. Bad language is not accepted and is dealt with by reinforcing 'little things like manners and social graces' in the context of teamwork, cooperation and listening to each other.

Working together on camps for at risk students enabled teachers from one school to learn about approaches that worked with particular students by observing each other in action. Other helpful strategies include regular feedback sheets (but this is time consuming); reading comments on student conduct rolls; having an informal lunch once a fortnight to catch up on students' progress; and simply running through the rolls to find out what students have been doing. A spin-off for students is when teachers can comment on something they have achieved in another area. This helps to raise their self-esteem. However, in the end these programs require:

> *... a certain sort of person ...somebody who has deep respect for where the kids are at the moment and then has a mission to step them forward from the point that they are at.*

Assertions and Recommendations

- Without appropriate funding some programs will continue to run, however others will die. For example:

  If FSS funding vanishes, then what will take its place?

- Opportunities for students to undertake practical placement in the workplace and career exploration are critical to the success of these programs.

- Homework support is needed for students involved in at risk programs.

- Greater communication and continuity is required with parents and between schools. For example:

  I would say it is so important for there to be that one person there to look after that group. And also for the parents too – when contacting the school, they ask for you. If they want to know what's happening or how (their children) *are going, because you have met them and you have spent so much time over the last two years.*

- Both students and schools are placing increased value on 'alternative' formal qualifications and education, such as the completion of part or all of a certificate. However, there is increased need to provide greater access to certificate programs.

- There is a need to raise the profile of the success of schools and students. For example, one school is introducing statements of attainment that will be presented to students at a full school assembly at the end of the year:

  One of the things that I note that one of the students said is that it makes such a difference to them to be able to go into their own class room, back to the main stream class, and say that they have done something that they have passed. I have got a kid who has said he has never passed anything in his life. And they passed something. They got a credit towards their certificate for it. ... I am not saying that they have or haven't passed, but they felt that they did the work themselves and they did it well and it was OK by someone in authority. If that's what it takes to get this young person to say, 'Have we got any more exercises?' I'm all for it.

  You will find these kids have always been in the audience. They have never stood in front of the audience and received anything.

- The current cohort of students has nothing to compare to, and hence do not always fully appreciate the specialised attention they receive.
- The 'Exploring Career Pathways' Program has a high level of validity within the school, especially in Year 9 where there has been no history of work experience or placement occurring. Within Year 10 it could be used to complement and expand upon the current work experience program. It would also allow at risk students to gain a broader level of experience in the workplace.
- There needs to be greater use of the opportunities provided by the 'Exploring Career Pathways' program across the relevant year level and also a greater sense of shared vision for the purpose of the program by relevant staff. More thought needs to be given to how these programs are introduced. In this case, it lacked focus and was very much done 'on the run', as no one was initially clear about its purpose, relevance and, in fact, who was responsible for the supervision of the program. Nevertheless, the school has started to develop a more flexible approach to dealing with at risk students and this is an area that needs to be further enhanced and developed. This school is currently exploring an alternative curriculum structure for Year 9 that could be the basis for this type of approach.

Experiences, Learning and Outcomes from the Action Research Process

The project has made the individual schools involved more aware of the outstanding work that is being done across the Program Area.

By participating in this process, I was able to see how other schools were dealing with similar problems and to expand my imagination as to the possible responses that were available to deal with these issues. The members of the process were very willing to share their ideas and views which challenged my own way of thinking.

- The Action Research Team was an expansion of the FSS Committee's work in conjunction with the Region's Area Consultative Committee and the team expressed the need to continue to share ideas and programs between schools. For example:

  This has been a valuable resource for me, a group of people who are committed to provision of courses and programs for at risk youth. The sharing and exchange of ideas is marvellous.

  One of the big things that has come across to me has been the amount we can learn from each other.

- The attendance by all AR team members at another school for the student focus groups was seen as a valuable experience, both from hearing the student's views and working with the AR team facilitator.

- The cultural, geographical and socio-economic differences between the schools did mean that the issues faced by each of the schools did not always allow for an easy transference of ideas and programs.

CLUSTER APPROACHES TO REDUCING EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING

FSS Program Case Study: Darebin/Moreland Network

The Focus: collaborating in and across school clusters to create innovative approaches to reduce early school leaving and assist those returning to school.

This case study describes the findings that emerged from two clusters who took different approaches to addressing issues for at risk students. One cluster initiated four projects: the development of a screening instrument; an investigation of the viability of literacy and numeracy online; outreach high-risk activities; and enterprise education. Schools in the other cluster worked separately on existing or new programs in each of their schools. Common elements were: high risk activities to build self-esteem; preparation for work and independent living; work experience and literacy and numeracy tuition. This cluster also worked closely with a youth worker from the local City Council who assisted students to 'get to and stay at school'.

The Author: Marilyn Kell

Projects Studied

Darebin Cluster

The FSS Program in the Darebin Cluster proposed to initiate four innovative strategies to service at risk students. These are described below:

Screening instrument

The cluster commissioned La Trobe University to develop a computer-based instrument which will be used to assess the at risk status of student at the end of Year 8 or early Year 9. This test has been piloted and is being administered in all four schools. The instrument will be used in conjunction with other measures such as teacher opinion and demographic information. The screening instrument will also identify key factors which will assist in determining strategies to be employed to address individual needs of students.

Literacy and numeracy online

The cluster proposed the provision of on-line tutorials for literacy and numeracy. It was hoped that this would link in with Competency Based Training (CBT) and VCE on-line. To date investigation is continuing for a suitable on-line product.

Outreach

This strategy provides outdoor, high-risk activities aimed at improving social skills and self-esteem. Because of the specialised qualifications and the expensive specialist equipment required for these activities (ranging from one to four days), the cluster contracted a local provider who has worked in conjunction with each school. Cluster members felt that this had been a highly successful strategy.

Enterprise Education

Representatives from Enterprise Australia came to the schools and worked with selected at risk students. In establishing a small business including advertising, marketing and accounting, the students were not only gaining business skills but improving their self-esteem, team dynamics and literacy and numeracy skills.

Moreland Cluster

Schools in this cluster chose a range of projects which each school believed both matched the character of the school and reflected a common issue/theme across the schools (that is, early school leavers). These are listed below:

- An all-inclusive, compulsory subject for Year 9 students in a single sex, non-government school. This program involved parents and community members and promoted students' team work, planning and decision making.
- A parallel program in a small secondary college for Year 10 students who wished to combine their studies with weekly work placement. Study had a practical emphasis and was assessed according to the Key Competencies. The course promoted teamwork, self-confidence, development of authentic work skills and planning career directions beyond Year 10.

- A subject within an inclusive curriculum for Year 10 students with a poor school record, including specialised teaching where necessary.
- Special classes for Years 9-12 students returning to school after periods of non-attendance due to abuse, homelessness or drug use or who have issues in their lives which prevent them continuing in a mainstream setting. It is an activity-based, student-centred, vocationally-oriented program in which students set goals for achievement and develop the communication skills and routine required for a return to a mainstream setting. This program operates within its own facility on the school premises. Another program for similar students operates at a different location.
- A withdrawal program for 18 Year 10 students on a modified program which included one day per week each at work experience and TAFE. This was later modified to an activities-based program for Years 10 and 11 promoting staying at school and future career directions.

The project(s) within each school, and as a cluster response, required the coordination of Youth Workers in, for example, assisting students to get to school and stay at school. Despite the different arrangements most schools had a fairly common set of activities. These included:

- High-risk activities aimed at building and reinforcing notions of teamwork, improving self-esteem and decision making skills. These ranged from one-day to four-day activities in the metropolitan area or beyond it. Some schools insisted that students be a part of planning and organising these activities.
- Preparation for work and independent living. This involved visits to a range of work sites, Learner Driver classes, First Aid classes, meetings with community leaders in a range of fields, CV preparation, orientation around the city in terms of using public transport.
- Work experience – in situ experience of working in a full-time job, either one day per week or taken as a one week block.
- Literacy and numeracy tuition – generally at school and often integrated into other activities such as First Aid and Learner Driver courses.

Focus and Purpose of the Action Research Team

The great differences in the nature of the projects from each cluster were not conducive to action research in its more common form. However, the groups agreed to meet in order to reflect on their projects and try to find some common elements which had been valuable for assisting students at risk of not completing secondary school. Their focus questions were:

- In terms of the submissions made how have the aims of the projects been met?
- What is the most appropriate age/year to introduce students to 'at risk' services'?

- Does the gender mix influence the outcomes of these programs?
- Is there a benefit in withdrawing students?
- How successful have these programs been for students *returning* to school?
- How have these projects impacted on school organisation?

This approach seemed to be the most suitable for professional educators whose major concern is the students in their care. Participants were asked to be open to the experiences of others in their cluster and from the other cluster. It was taken as a time to freely discuss experiences – positive and negative, to reflect on achievements and future possibilities.

Action Research Team Processes

The action research team consisted of two clusters of schools. The Darebin Cluster included a P-12 College and four government secondary colleges. The Moreland Cluster comprised a language centre, one catholic secondary college and four government secondary colleges.

The schools in Darebin, while working independently within their own schools, functioned as a unit for each of the four foci of the project.

The Moreland cluster worked in partnership with Youth Services staff from the local City Council coordinating and assisting schools in the provision of services to students at risk. Each school ran its own projects, some of which were new and some of which were extensions of existing programs. The diversity of schools allowed for an interesting range of projects in terms of content, selection and procedure.

Most of the schools in these clusters are characterised by significant enrolments of Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) students. One school has approximately 30% indigenous enrolment and two have significant numbers of students who have been outside the education system for prolonged periods. One school is single sex and one school caters for students from Prep to Year 12.

Methods of Data Collection Used

In general all participants used anecdotal evidence when discussing the effects of these projects. Comments encompassed reflection from teachers, students and parents in terms of programs, teaching and learning and school organisation. One preliminary report on the Darebin Cluster's high-risk adventure activities was presented. It demonstrated that school retention is higher for those students who participate in these activities. Comments from teachers indicated that self-esteem and decision-making skills of individual students are significantly enhanced by these activities. Some schools noted that they had not addressed some of the issues raised in the team's focus questions, such as issues of gender.

Evaluation Data

In terms of the submissions made how have the aims of the projects been met?

- Improved school retention rates for ongoing students.
- Networking across schools was highly beneficial, teachers felt less isolated, Youth Workers felt more responsiveness from schools and were better able to return students to school.
- Schools (and staff in each school) began to focus on the need to provide services for at risk students in terms of more comprehensive benefits school wide and more thoughtful curriculum planning.
- Recognition of the need for a broader range of teaching/learning strategies to assist these students.
- Transition from school to work was thought to be only partially successful. Some schools gained greater awareness of the need to develop appropriate pathways for at risk students as a means of addressing the issues confronting these young people.

What is the most appropriate age/year to introduce students to 'at risk' services?

- In general, programs should be available to Year 9 and 10 students with an ongoing availability. Some students need time and space to resolve difficulties. Limiting provision to specific periods can be detrimental.
- Where a student is considered at risk prior to Year 9, services should be available.
- Coordination between primary and secondary sectors could be beneficial to younger at risk students.

While the notion of a diagnostic instrument for 'at risk' factors was not welcomed universally, it was agreed that only a longitudinal study (3 to 5 years) of the students at school where the test was administered would determine its validity.

Does the gender mix influence the outcomes of these programs?

Gender mix does not appear to influence the success of these programs. The factors that most influence the success of these programs are:

- cultural differences – negatively for girls;
- entrenched homelessness or itinerancy because of a lack of school continuity;
- family background; and
- school culture – with a need for a positive view of mainstream programs.

Is there a benefit in withdrawing students?

It was felt that this decision would be made by a school as a way of coping with at risk students. Preferred operational modes are:

- running parallel curricula, or
- working with the whole cohort (because the skills covered are beneficial and applicable to all students).

There was a preference for attendance in special programs *not to be* mandatory.

How can students feel less alienated at school?

In order to provide 'connectedness' for students, 'at risk' provision needs to:

- be a part of the school ethos and curriculum;
- harness services within and outside the school;
- recognise the role of parents and the wider community; and
- assist students in setting achievement goals and/or a sense of direction and purpose.

How successful have these programs been for students returning to school?

- Poor success rate.
- Students returning to school after extended periods of absenteeism require intense intervention.
- Currently Community and Adult Education is a reasonable alternative for these students. However, it would be preferable for more suitable interventions to be provided under the auspices of the schools.

How have these projects impacted on school organisation?

Timetabling

The following modes were seen as beneficial:

- Block timetabling;
- Ten day timetable.

Class size

- A maximum of 15 was most successful.
- No more than six in a high maintenance class.
- The skills being developed in alternative programs need to be valued. Appropriate assessment frameworks need to be determined for students undertaking alternative study programs.

Staffing

- Program coordinators need to have a time allowance for arranging elements of programs and meetings with a range of agencies, students and parents.
- Case managers need to assist students to function within the school structure.
- Students respond better if they come into contact with a reduced number of teachers.
- Community-based extra staff or skilled personnel add depth to programs.

Recommendations for Projects and Schools

- Efforts be made to recognise what 'at risk' is, especially in relation to girls.
- A means of tracking at risk students be established so that they do not continue to fall through the system.
- Funds be made available for a longitudinal study of student at schools where the 'at risk' assessment instrument (La Trobe University) was administered.
- Local government youth workers continue their association with schools.
- Funding be provided to research the drop out rate for students less than fifteen years of age.
- The geographical boundaries of DEET and the Department of Human Services be realigned to be common to assist local government staff in working between the two departments.
- Resources be made available to schools for advances to be made in connecting schools and students with the wider community and other outside organisations.
- Training be provided for teachers to help them recognise the effects of different cultural background on student achievement.
- Adequate, long term, ongoing funding and resourcing be provided for students with a history of entrenched homelessness or itinerancy as they require intense, high maintenance services.
- Investigate reintroduction of STC (School to Tertiary Certificate) programs.
- A means of measuring achievement in alternative programs against national competencies be developed.
- A school-wide focus be established by developing awareness of the issues and the teaching/learning practices relating to at risk young people.
- Resources be provided to schools to address absenteeism problems of students.

Experiences, Learning and Outcomes from the Action Research Process

Although the team believed they held vastly different opinions, they found a surprising number of points of agreement. Essentially these related to:

- the importance and magnitude of the task of assisting at risk students;
- the increased difficulty in assisting students with prolonged absence from school;
- the need for networking within and amongst schools and other community organisations and of having a person/group to coordinate the range of viable alternatives as the target group is a community issue;
- recognition of the need for smaller class sizes for these students;
- recognition of the severe time demands placed on teachers coordinating these programs; and
- the need for adequate, ongoing, long term funding so that students can be assisted for purposeful periods.

All participants were happy to share their successes and to learn from the experiences of others. They found the opportunity to network valuable.

All of the schools are proposing to continue the projects initiated under the Full Service Schools Program. Because of lack of funding some will reduce service provision or service breadth. Others will transfer funds from other areas of the school. All found that the commitment to the students had been worthwhile.

Addendum

One school which was adjacent to the designated Full Service Schools Program Area was invited to work with the members of the Moreland Cluster.

SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS: THE KEY TO SUCCESS

FSS Program Case Study: East Gippsland/ Latrobe/Wellington Network

The Focus: Community partnerships between schools and local providers and agencies.

Describing the work of Full Service Schools across the vast geographical area of East Gippsland/Latrobe/Wellington that includes many remote communities and schools, this case study highlights the importance of strong partnerships between schools and local agencies and organisations. While operating to some extent independently, all three regions affirmed the importance of local collaborative networks in assisting young people at risk, by providing sufficient diversity among programs for relevance to the local community and for meeting individual students' needs.

The Author: Leanne Healey

Introduction

The three regions of East Gippsland, Latrobe and Wellington comprise more than twenty Secondary Colleges spread throughout an area of some 35,000 square kilometres. The furthermost schools are separated by nearly 500 kilometres. For this reason, all FSS Program partners felt that successful outcomes were more likely to be achieved if problems with distance were overcome at a regional level. Indeed, to try to combine regions spread over vast distances and featuring diverse communities would have been an immense task and would have worked against many of the guiding principles and characteristics of successful education and

training programs for at risk and unemployed young people. Thus the decision to operate separately ensured that activities were relevant to the students' culture and community, met students' individual needs and could successfully build upon students' previous experiences. It was also felt, however, that these regional projects needed to report to a central Committee. Therefore, up to four members from each region formed the FSS Area Network Committee, the function of which was to oversee the three regional projects, with each one operating through a separate cluster and distinct networks.

The projects conducted in the regions varied to some extent but included Life and Social Skills Programs, Pre-Vocational Training Programs, Options for Work and Education Programs, Literacy and Numeracy Programs, Personal Development Programs, Special Programs for Girls or Boys, Job Readiness Programs, Certificate Programs in Trade Areas, Outdoor Education Programs and Case Management.

The Action Research Approach

Any action research needed to recognise the size of the area covered by the FSS Program. Initial ideas of using technology to overcome some of the distance barriers were not pursued as an option. Most of those involved in the action research required individual attention from a caring, concerned and interested person and this became a primary role of the action research facilitator.

In addition, for every individual program that was run as part of the FSS Area Program, a written evaluation was completed by the agency conducting it and the schools that had students participating in the program. Many of these agencies conducted interviews with the students, and in some circumstances their parents or guardians, as part of the evaluation process. Students were also interviewed by the action research facilitator (in accordance with the rules and guidelines set down by the University of Melbourne Ethics Committee). Members of the Area Network Committee also produced written evaluations of the overall FSS Program in each region. This case study, then, draws on these evaluations and the knowledge gained by the action research facilitator in working with teachers in each region.

Program Outcomes

A total of 1189 young people participated in some form in the Full Service Schools programs over the two-year period. Approximately 80% of those students have been retained at school. As well as an increase in numbers retained and attracted back into schools, however, there has also been an enhanced level of participation by this group of students. Positive feedback has been received from teachers, students and their parents. Improvements have been noted in behaviour, attitudes, confidence and self-esteem. Students have enjoyed the activities provided for them and have been able to participate in a positive and successful experience. Relationships between schools' careers teachers and welfare staff and these students have also become more positive.

Other important spin-offs were that the programs 'Brought together students from remote areas with the same needs' and 'Broke counterproductive peer groups and established supportive friendships'. Of the money provided and the relationships established, teachers commented:

> *Finally had some money to pay experts to work with some of our really troubled kids. We were able to run a program headed by two psychologists that specialized in the area of at risk young people. The impact that this program had on these young women was astounding. What was even more satisfying was that the families of these young women were willing to seek further assistance from these professionals outside the program and outside the school.*
>
> *It was wonderful to be able to properly compensate skilled counsellors from outside agencies to implement effective case management with our at risk students.*
>
> *For many of the students these programs have given them 'a reason to be'. Many have been able to link with a significant adult who takes interest in them and treats them as a person with something to offer. Developing a personal relationship is so important for these kids.*

And of a particular program it was said:

> *The benefits to the community from this program were wonderful. Students who were often seen hanging around town and causing trouble were seen engaging in constructive community projects. Building a ramp for the hospital, building a rotunda for the town, nesting boxes for bird life, seating for parks. The kids were proud of their achievements and satisfied that they had finished a project and that it was there for everyone to see.*

When asked to provide comments on evaluation forms about the best parts of certain programs, students noted the following: 'Having fun with all my friends while we were doing this was great'; 'Learning how to cope in the bush'; 'I like how we were treated'; 'Learnt heaps, even something about wood work which was totally unexpected'; 'Learning how to work in a team'; 'A chance to learn about outdoors'; and 'Unexpected spin-off being able to pass middle school'.

In addition, a greater awareness of training and employment options has been developed in schools through the 'invaluable community partnerships' created. Schools are now far more aware of many other opportunities offered by Group Training, Adult and Community Education and TAFE. Moreover, the Program has enhanced relationships between these community educators. When working with the school sector, these organisations seem to be working on a far more cooperative and less competitive basis, for example, 'competition between job network members (has) broken down'.

Factors Contributing to Success of the FSS Gippsland Area Program

In general, it appeared that school-community partnerships were the key to the success of the FSS Area Program in East Gippsland/Latrobe/Wellington, with schools working cooperatively with program providers to examine options for students to work outside the secondary education system in off-campus activities. For example, the agencies and organisations delivering FSS programs in this area included TAFE, private providers, the ACE and university sectors, Group Training Companies and Youth Support Services, with the 'professionalism and suitability of staff, commitment and understanding of the client group' being much appreciated by those in the schools. Below, a number of characteristics associated with these partnerships that are important to their success are explored.

Collaboration and strength of the partnerships

Each network or cluster worked somewhat differently and had a different history of collaboration. For example, a high proportion of schools in one region were already tackling the problem of what to do with at risk students, and hence were already offering alternative programs at the beginning of the FSS Program. The Full Service Schools funding enabled the expansion of these programs. This approach to the project was cost-effective, time-effective and pro-active in developing positive approaches to dealing with the target group of young people at risk.

The collaborative nature of the cluster developed in this region also meant that the model developed for the project was extremely transferable. From the very outset, it was recognised that some schools were more advanced with their work in the 'at risk' area than others. The strength of the network is that it has been able to nurture all schools along the way. Schools just beginning to work in this area have been able to learn many valuable and time-saving aspects of implementing 'at risk' programs into their core curriculum. Strategies, structures and resources have all been shared and transferred. As one of the members of their committee said:

> *The network that has developed between the FSS Colleges has been particularly useful from a personal and professional perspective. It would be beneficial for this to continue in 2001 even though funding will no longer be available.*

And at its final meeting for 2000, this committee committed professional development funds for meetings in 2001 to share sustainability strategies.

In another region, it was the collaboration and strength of the partnerships between schools and local providers and agencies that formed the cornerstone of their FSS project. This strong collaboration has extended into the Managed Individual Pathways project and the Local Learning and Employment Network. The committee meets regularly, has good links with all community providers and

partners, and is able to pinpoint issues quickly and work on developing effective solutions. This reinforces the point made by the Successful Learning Project report *Providing Education and Training for At Risk and Unemployed Young People* (Ward et al, 1998, p. 9), that successful programs are local, are relevant to the student's culture and community and meet the student's individual needs.

This region worked as a cluster, delivered as a cluster, and encompassed all community providers, keeping the integrity of the project intact throughout the two-year funding period. It also adopted and followed the guidelines and principles for the development of the FSS Program as outlined in preliminary briefings. Initially, the committee decided to utilise existing programs from outside providers that catered for a wide range of student needs. As a first step, this decision was very effective. The project got up and running very quickly and collaborative networks were established and provided good value for money, as programs did not necessarily have to be developed from scratch.

During the first year of operation of the project the committee was better able to identify the cohort of students at risk and consequently modify and develop the activities on offer to respond to this very diverse client group. A comment received on an evaluation sheet from a member of the Area Committee, who is not involved as a program provider, pinpoints one of the underlying successes of this project.

> *This Cluster has led the way with a 'Community Approach' in trying to work with the project funds. The school agency links established initially were valuable for continuing support for the program. The initial meeting and then ongoing meetings have been inclusive of provider input. The agencies seem to have been more prepared to give feedback when asked and look for improvement in the outcomes. With the agencies participating in this process they certainly gained more ownership with the delivery of the program.*

Indeed, the community project links with the ACE sector, TAFE sector, Department of Natural Resources and Environment and the YMCA were said to be 'fantastic'.

Accountability to stakeholders

The collaborative nature of the cluster described immediately above also led to processes that were very open. Meetings were always well attended by all agencies involved and agencies responded quickly and effectively to programming, reporting, evaluating and reviewing requests. Thus, the project was very accountable to schools, students, parents and funding providers.

School support for the partnerships

Across all three regions, the FSS Program has received full School Principal support. The Principals were particularly impressed by the links made with community providers and the value for money obtained through the programs on offer. The FSS Program cemented relationships and became a platform for exploring other opportunities and funding sources. Principal support and

commitment has also had a flow-on effect to other structures and committees within schools and assisted with school-wide understanding and sensitivity to the objectives of the project. Recognised positions of responsibility and time allowances have also been set aside by some of the schools for FSS 'at risk' work and this has greatly assisted with the Program's sustainability.

Strong networks to maintain partnerships

Strong networks in all three regions place this area in a very good position to effectively manage 'The Pathways Project', introduced in March 2001. They also provide a strong basis for any other community and education partnership projects that may evolve. The strength of the networks also meant that problems associated with distance could be solved effectively. Negotiations enabled extra funding to be committed to cover transport costs for students in outlying schools. Decisions were made to locate a number of courses in the outlying areas, so that students would not be isolated. Extensive community networks have been consolidated through the operation of this Program and it is linked with other programs such as traineeships, New Apprenticeships, JPET, Jobs Pathways, VET in Schools and Job Club. The local Koori community has also worked with program providers in the delivery of courses.

Inclusiveness

All regions went to extra lengths to ensure that remote schools and communities outside the central towns were catered for. Costings were worked out to include extra transport arrangements and delivery of courses outside the central location. Parents were particularly happy to have their children participating in courses outside the school. Indeed, some parents made links with community providers and were often happy to engage and pay for counsellors, psychologists and other professional personnel that they had come across in FSS activities – to work with their families outside the FSS Program, thus building further partnerships.

Diversity and flexibility of activities on offer to suit a large range of students

In general, it appeared that finding local solutions to local problems and providing a mix of models and approaches, both led to, and were outcomes of, the success of the partnerships. Thus the Program enabled schools to be creative in managing students who could be difficult under normal classroom situations. As one teacher commented: 'The FSS project provided a very subtle way of dealing with difficult problems'.

In one Program Area, FSS money enhanced and built upon internal curriculum models that were already in existence. The two larger schools in the Area then became models and mentors for the smaller schools who were yet to begin the process. Extensive collaboration and a strong network were built. In addition, the internal school curriculum model really started to show results when run in conjunction with intensive case management that was sourced from an outside

agency. This two-pronged attack really appeared to pay dividends. A mix of students from each of the four secondary colleges involved participated in each program outsourced from a range of local agencies and providers. This process brought together students from remote areas with the same needs and had the added advantage of breaking up disruptive peer groups and establishing new and supportive friendship groups in many cases.

Value for money

The FSS Area Program has delivered an outstanding range of programs. The networks and clusters have managed and utilised discretionary funding very effectively. The general consensus of the Area Network Committee is that much has been achieved in a relatively short time period with a limited allocation of funding. This Program is a model that sets a benchmark for incorporating and embedding Full Service Schools principles into the curriculum of a school. In addition, FSS funding has enabled schools involved with this Program to get recognition for all of the past work that has been done with at risk students, giving the schools the opportunity to formalise this work into the curriculum.

Issues arising from the FSS Program Area

The following issues were identified as concerns for the Area Network Committee.

- Funding for the FSS Program is not ongoing. The Program has only lasted two years and at risk students are still in schools. In fact the demand for programs is increasing.
- Time allowances, positions of responsibilities and modifications to mainstream curriculum will be insufficient to sustain the extra level of commitment that the FSS funding provided for at risk students.
- Being able to meet payments to providers if money does not come through on time.
- Tracking and monitoring of the students. At the beginning of the Program the Area Network Committee set short-term, medium term and long term deliverables. There is no funding available to track students and measure the long-term outcomes initially outlined.
- The Program has acknowledged the importance of connecting with these young people at risk and forming important relationships. Yet, the Committee and program providers are concerned about their ability to maintain the rapport and personal relationships that have been built up, in the absence of further funding.
- Due to a lack of flexibility in the VCE, students participating in Full Service Schools' activities cannot receive any recognition or credit on their return to school that counts towards their VCE studies. Some schools particularly ensured that the activities carried out as part of the FSS Program were formally acknowledged and contributed to students' formal studies, but this was usually at the Year 10 level.

Ability of schools to keep up with the latest programs and their requirements. There is a need for schools to resource their staff to enable them to select and refer appropriate students to activities and to liaise with providers to monitor and plan for their students and to negotiate re-entry into the classroom.

Conclusion

The Full Service Schools Program in East Gippsland/Latrobe/Wellington addressed a range of issues with practical and effective programs, as evidenced in the statistics and comments included in this case study. The Area Network Committee believes this Program is superior to JPP and Pathways, which are predominantly case management with little value-adding. As a school's Full Service Coordinator commented:

> *You can talk all you like to these kids – but to be effective you need to put them into the environment or to provide a program that lets them assess themselves and assess where they have to go to win that job. It's no good teaching someone to get a job if they don't have the skills to maintain that job. The Region's Full Service Schools Project has provided students with those skills.*

Thus, the FSS Program has enhanced existing innovative and diverse programs for students at risk, as well as growing new programs. The networks have been able to nurture and assist schools to work towards the ultimate benchmark for this Program – the point where FSS programs, thinking and principles are embedded into the curriculum and the philosophy of participating schools. The principle that the focus of provision must be on the needs of young people, rather than on the institutions or rules that currently govern or constrain them, has been a central feature of the FSS Program in this area.

SECOND CHANCES

FSS Program Case Study: Frankston/Peninsula Network

The Focus: re-engaging students who are 'on the edge and beyond'.

Programs in two schools are described with particular emphasis on students' experiences of re-engaging with schooling. Some overall conclusions are developed from both case studies to provide key ideas for enabling marginalised young people to see themselves as worthwhile individuals and acquire a purpose in continuing their schooling.

The Author: Dr Jeff Northfield

Vocational Course for Years 9 and 10

College A offers a Vocational Course to students in Years 9 and 10. This course is designed for students who lack motivation for their studies and who are at risk of not reaching the VCE.

Students are involved in a program that includes English, Mathematics, Science, The Arts and Technology. The program also includes Work Experience for one day per week and sessions related to work skills and social skills. In term 1 each student takes part in an Industry Visit program. Each week, students visit different workplaces to hear about and see the skills and competencies needed to succeed in the workplace.

College A feels the Vocational Course has been very successful in retaining students and motivating them to succeed. Its successes in improving engagement and opportunities for students who have not been involved in their schooling are exemplified in the following students' stories.

In 1998, Jim is expelled from Year 8 in Term 4. The school is able to provide another opportunity in an alternative program at Year 9 but it is going to be up to Jim and his parents to decide whether he is ready to try again. The alternative program requires decisions to 'opt in' and a degree of commitment from students who generally have limited records of commitment. Jim appears to have gained little from his schooling experience and his attitudes and behaviour have deteriorated beyond the patience of the staff involved with him. Jim decides to accept the alternative program opportunity and by the end of 1999 is still in school with a greatly improved attitude and is gaining from his experiences.

Brian is a school refuser and will not attend the special teaching unit that may be able to better respond to his needs. The alternative program possibility is offered and Brian negotiates another opportunity. He accepts some responsibility for his progress and now meets the Rotary members as they regularly attend the school to contribute to the alternative program.

'How do you get into the program?' ... a group of six students are being asked about their views of the alternative program.

'You have to prove that you are going to make an effort ...they won't take anyone and my parents and I had to think about how things would be different and what I would have to do.' The school has developed a way of giving 20 – 30 students like Jim and Brian another chance in a way that requires them to accept some responsibility for their learning.

After almost an hour listening to the students talking about their alternative program experience there has been little discussion of the content. They can be encouraged to describe the 'life skills', communication support, work experience and the industry visit program, but they need no encouragement to describe why this program has made their schooling more relevant. Phrases like '... people are interested in me', 'classes are smaller and we have good teachers', '... teachers

take time to talk to me' and '... I feel I am valued in the school' indicate the acknowledgment of the time and effort of teachers.

At another level, students reflect on the way in which they have developed new relationships in the alternative program. As they talk about more maturity, they reflect on the value of breaking old peer group relationships where they were unquestioning followers and having to work at developing relationships with new students, teachers and community members. Perhaps this has allowed some growth in self-esteem and self-confidence in the students as the program acted to 'break the schooling routine' which was doing little for these students.

The program should not be taken for granted. It requires a significant commitment from the school and the teachers who volunteer to participate. The satisfaction they gain in working with students who have achieved little from schooling is gained at a cost to the teachers. It is clearly a demanding and emotional task to be working with these students and relief from this teaching allotment is often sought after one and two year periods. The alternative program has school-wide implications as it requires more staffing resources than other programs and the deployment of good volunteer teachers from other areas of need in the school.

The school will maintain its commitment to the alternative program while it values the engaging or re-engaging of students like Jim and Brian into their schooling experiences. It is a low profile effort, probably only connecting with a fraction of the students who withdraw from their schooling experience during the middle years. Their FSS experience shows that the school can make a difference when there seems to be little cause for optimism, and in persisting with students there is the extra benefit of better understanding the way school can contribute to the growth of students.

An Alternative Year 10 Program for Marginalised Young People

College B has a history of responding to students who have had difficulty fitting comfortably into the secondary school. The FSS Project allowed existing initiatives to be affirmed and further developed. Responding to the range of student needs and attitudes has led to a variety of alternative approaches in the school. These are described below through success stories of participating students.

Tristan is in Year 11 after making sound progress throughout the school. He is now contributing to an issue that is widely recognised in the school. The unwillingness to spend time reading is common in the junior and middle school and engaging boys in reading activities is a particular concern. Tristan has volunteered to spend time encouraging reading with Years 7 and 8 students and so model the value and importance of reading to younger boys in the school. He is accepting his responsibility to participate in the school community and, in his case, developing a commitment to following a teaching career. The school clearly recognises the need to promote a greater involvement of boys in more active learning and accepting more responsibility for their progress in school.

Jason is described as 'living on the edge' in both school and life. He has continued with his schooling as a member of an alternative program in Year 10. Jason volunteered to undertake this program and negotiated a program that emphasises life and study skills together with mainstream study. He is with a small group of students who receive a great deal of support from volunteer teachers and from the other students who have 'opted into' this program. As a result of the experience, Jason is still persisting with school. One teacher describes his present situation - 'He is surviving... but still on the edge.... he has learned to seek help and now knows when to stop and be sensitive to others and their concerns'. Jason is seen as a 'success' in this school as it seeks to contribute to the development of its students in a variety of ways, with academic progress not always the main focus of attention.

Jill is a member of the same group after three years as a marginal participant in her secondary schooling. She reflects that school was not relevant and she never felt any satisfaction as a learner. She learned that she was not as smart as the others and there was no point in continuing. Her negotiated program, however, has allowed her to link her passion for horses into a program that supports her interests. She talks of making new friends and feeling her interests are valued. Her future in secondary schooling is not clear but she is seeing some purpose in the time she is spending in school.

A former student from this program, Marie, is now completing Year 12. As she began Year 10 she was described as a person without any self-confidence. 'She would always have her eyes down and could not speak to anyone.' Marie expresses the significant impact that the alternative program had on her as she reflects on her development in an essay. 'If I am having 'troble' in a subject I just don't give up. I ask for help and try harder ... I feel proud of myself even if I do fail because I had the guts to try ... Role models that have influenced my behaviour on my self have mainly been teachers over the years ... Like Mrs R, she really boosted my self confidence ... the way she used to be so proud if I done well, really uplifted my self-esteem'.

It would appear that the alternative program provides an opportunity for teachers to value and encourage students in a way that is not possible in the mainstream secondary program. Each year, 18-20 students 'contract into' the program with parental involvement essential. How many students have 'withdrawn' from the schooling experience and do not get an opportunity to maintain and perhaps develop a better connection with what their school can offer? Year 9 teachers are able to suggest students who might benefit from the program but in the end it is the students and parents who must make the commitment to participate.

College B continues a Study Skills program into Year 11 and continually reviews all programs. The extra resource and staffing demands of maintaining such programs is acknowledged by the school. However once these initiatives are implemented and gains are made with students who are 'on the edge and beyond', such programs become part of what the school values as the staff better understand the needs of the community.

Insights and Recommendations

Several common themes emerge from considering the alternative programs at both Colleges:

- It seems to be important that students are required to 'opt into' the program. They then feel they have some responsibility or ownership for what happens.
- The small classes and volunteer teachers who value the students and their interests are seen as crucial by the students. Academic progress, in the short-term, is not seen as the only way to be a worthwhile person in the school.
- The programs for students are negotiated with efforts made to link to life and work interests, so that school is seen as more relevant.
- The peer groups which are powerful in shaping the behaviour of many students are broken and students gain a great deal by forming new relationships based on understanding and support.
- Students now rarely blame others for their situations. They begin to accept some responsibility and realise that they can have some control over what happens in their lives.
- Academic successes are limited but there are fewer limits on personal growth and improved self-confidence. These students tend to see their schooling experience as valuing different outcomes to the school where they did not fit in the early years.

PROGRAMS AND ARRANGEMENTS IN A MAJOR PROVINCIAL CITY

FSS Program Case Study: Greater Geelong Network

The Focus: The effects of programs and arrangements for young people in 'Major

Provincial City' who were at risk of leaving school before completing their secondary education or, in the case of one school, had already 'dropped out'.

This case study describes an assisted self-evaluation of programs and arrangements in four secondary schools in 'Major Provincial City'.[13] The evaluation was conducted between the middle of May and the end of October 2000 by seven teachers[14] from the four schools with the assistance of an action research facilitator from the local university.

The Author: Dr Colin Henry, Deakin University

The Schools and Their Full Service Schools Program Projects

Provincial City College

A distinguishing feature of the provision made for students 'at risk' at *Provincial City College* is that its programs and arrangements are specifically designed for students who have already left school. In 1999, prompted by changes in the conditions of Youth Allowance payments, 26 students returned to school to participate in the College's alternative programs. An extra 14 students returned to resume their HSC studies. This meant that 40 students in all returned to continue their schooling at *Provincial City College* in 1999, making it one of the schools with the highest rate of students returning to school in Australia that year. In 2000, a total of 31 students were involved in projects related to the FSS Program at *Provincial City College*. Among them were students who were continuing on from the previous year, and a new group of students considered to be at risk of leaving school prematurely.

The two main programs offered as part of the FSS Program at *Provincial City College* in 2000 were CREATE and the CGEA.

CREATE is a personal development program offered by a private provider. Its stated objective is 'to enable students to excel and reach their maximum potential in education'. The main aims of the program are to improve students' self-esteem and self-confidence, and to provide them with the skills they need for returning to study and living independent lives. Outdoor education activities are one of the means used to achieve those aims.

In 1999, when the CGEA was first taught at *Provincial City College*, responsibility for teaching the program was out-sourced to a private provider. That arrangement was not entirely satisfactory, however, because it allowed for only one double session per week to be 'delivered' to students at 'Provincial City College'. In 2000 the decision was made to incorporate the CGEA within the College's general curriculum. For students studying the CGEA, the new arrangement provided one unit of English and one unit of Literacy to be taught over the whole year, and one unit of Numeracy to be taught during first semester. As part of the same arrangement, students were also able to choose three mainstream VCE units or VET modules they were interested in studying.

An additional feature of the FSS Program initiative at *Provincial City College* was that students enrolled in CREATE or the CGEA were given access to additional support services. Those services included private tuition; assistance with completing homework; help with securing funding for books, spectacles and class

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[13] For reasons of confidentiality, the schools are called 'Provincial City College', 'North City College', 'Private City College', and 'South City College'.

[14] Three of the teacher/evaluators were from one school, two from another, and one each from the other two schools.

materials; training in developing time-management skills; careers advice; referrals to health services; and assistance with resumé writing, applying for part-time employment, budgeting, dealing with Centrelink, and finding suitable accommodation.

North City College

The program developed for students at risk at *North City College* is known as PEAK (Practical Education and Knowledge). PEAK was introduced in 1998 for Year 10 students who were thought to be in danger of leaving school before completing Year 10. In that year, 17 students were enrolled in PEAK, 12 of whom successfully completed the program. In 1999, 35 students were enrolled in PEAK, almost half of them students from other schools. In 2000, the number of students enrolled in the alternative program was reduced to 20. The majority of those students were *North City College's* own students, and the decline in enrolments reflected a decision that had been made at the end of the previous year to cease recruiting students from outside the College. The reason for that decision was that *North City College* lacked the resources needed to cope with the large number of students who would have taken the alternative program if it had been open to all comers.

PEAK is designed for students with a variety of social and educational needs. Many PEAK students have had only limited success with their previous schooling and, partly as a result of that unfortunate experience, are judged to have low self-esteem and to lack confidence in their own ability. When tested, most, but not all, PEAK students demonstrated low levels of literacy and numeracy.

The major component of PEAK is the CGEA and CGEA classes account for 15 of a weekly total of 30 PEAK classes. Those classes are taught through a partnership arrangement with a nearby TAFE Institute. A variety of self-esteem and team building activities conducted by teachers and external providers complement CGEA classes. In addition, PEAK students spend one day a week (or 6 sessions) in work experience placements. The remaining 9 classes consist of electives chosen from the normal Year 10 Arts, Health and Physical Education curricula.

It is important to appreciate that the FSS Program arrangements provided at *North City College* in 2000, were designed to enhance an existing program. By 2000, the PEAK program was already in its third year of operation at *North City College*. The FSS Program project was, therefore, neither a fresh initiative for students at risk, nor a 'stand-alone' program. Funds obtained through the FSS Program were used to employ tutors for students who needed to improve their basic literacy and numeracy skills. Those funds were sufficient to allow tutors to work with one or two students at a time, and a subsequent judgment was that the literacy and numeracy tutorials represented the most significant impact the FSS Program initiative had on students enrolled in the PEAK program at *North City College*.

Private City College

The alternative program developed at *Private City College* is for Year 10 students. Because the program focuses on job preparation for students at risk, work experience is an important feature of the curriculum. Work experience is combined with a number of modules designed to provide students with careers guidance and practical assistance in developing such skills as writing resumés, managing money, filling out forms, and handling interview situations. The alternative program occupies students for approximately two hours a week which means that students drop Outdoor Education, Information Technology and Religious Education, subjects they would normally take as part of the College's mainstream Year 10 program.

South City College

The impetus for *South City College's* alternative program was a federal grant it, and two adjacent secondary Colleges, attracted in 1999. One strand of the arrangements developed for students at risk at *South City College* permits selected Year 8 students to substitute Literacy Support classes for studies of LOTE. During 2000, Literacy Support classes were provided three times a week for 16 Year 8 boys in two groups of eight.

In 2000 *South City College* also became a Registered Training Organisation so that it could offer Work Education Certificates 1 and 2 to Year 10 students. The Work Education Certificate course was delivered by a private provider to a group of 12 Year 10 students. The same students, who had a history of struggling with English and were considered poor readers and lacking in confidence, were also able to study a modified Year 10 English program.

The Work of the Evaluation Team

The evaluation team met on three occasions. Meetings were held in the university, and were scheduled and arranged on behalf of the evaluation team by the action research facilitator. The main reason for holding meetings in the university was the convenience of its location.

The first meeting of the evaluation team was held in June for one hour at 4pm. Four teachers from three of the six schools that had initially expressed interest in participating in the FSS Program Evaluation attended this meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to develop a shared understanding of the nature, objectives, form and duration of the proposed evaluation project. A significant understanding of this project *as action research* emerged during the course of the meeting. Because the evaluation was occurring relatively late in the life of the schools' FSS Program projects, the judgment of the teachers who attended the meeting was that it was inappropriate to begin making, implementing and monitoring new action plans. It did not, however, seem unreasonable to regard the proposed activity as an evaluation of the first cycle of planned changes that had been conducted as part of the FSS Program, nor to expect that valuable lessons for the future could emerge from studying what had occurred the first time around.

The evaluators met for the second time in July for half a day. Seven teachers representing the four schools participating in the evaluation, and four students from one of the schools, attended this meeting. Prior to the meeting each member of the evaluation team had been asked to begin collecting evidence of the effects of FSS Program activities in their school, and to bring the evidence they had collected to the July meeting so that it could be shared and discussed. To be more specific, members of the evaluation team were asked to bring some, or all, of the following information to the meeting:

- three enlarged photographs that captured the best of what was being done in their school under the banner of the FSS Program;
- brief answers written anonymously by five students currently participating in FSS Program projects, to two questions: What are three things you like about this program? And, What are three things you would change if you could do so in order make it a better program?
- a ten or fifteen minute long audiotaped interview with an adult deeply involved in the program that addressed the same questions (What are three things you like about this Program and three things you would change if you could?), and ten copies of a transcript of the first five minutes of that interview; and
- a memoir of their own personal reactions to two significant incidents or events that you thought captured the flavour of FSS Program in their school.

Members of the evaluation team responded generously to the invitation to collect and bring to the meeting evidence of the effects of programs and arrangements provided for students at risk. The meeting consisted of teachers distributing and talking to written accounts of projects in the FSS Program in their schools, supported by evidence of what had been attempted and achieved. As indicated, students from one school who were present at the meeting were able speak from experience about what they liked, and would change, about the alternative program and arrangements provided for them.

The third meeting (half a day) of the group was held in August. Four students from each of the four schools (sixteen in all), and seven teachers (representing the same four schools) attended this meeting. In addition, and unexpectedly, a teacher from another school joined the meeting, along with a representative of a private provider and two of his students. The agenda circulated for the August 10 meeting read as follows:

12.15:	Welcome, students leave for tour of the university campus with a Student Association guide
12.25:	Adults' lunch in UMR17
12.45:	Students have lunch together in the student cafeteria with Student Association 'chaperone'
1.20:	All meet again in UMR12
1.30:	Students begin working in 4's (cross-school groups): 'Circles of Knowledge' designed to answer the following questions:

When you began this program what did you expect to gain from it?
To what extend has this program met those expectations?
What has encouraged you to remain in the program?
How is this program different from other programs in your school?
What do you most like about this program?
What would you change about the program if you could?

Adults, in a separate room, begin discussing the following topics:

- *When this program began, what did you think students expected to gain from it?*
- *To what extend do you believe this program has met students' expectations?*
- *What has encouraged students to remain in the program?*
- *How do students see this program as different from other programs operating in*
- *their school?*
- *What do you think students most like about the program?*
- *What do you think students would change about the program if they could?*

2.15: Students begin compiling whole group's answers to the 6 questions. Adults begin preparing their group's answers to the 6 questions.
2.45: Presentation and comparison of both students' and adults' answers: award for most productive group (!)
3.15: Awarding certificates of participation to all students.
3.30: Farewell

This agenda embodied a response to two specific requests from the teacher/ evaluators:

1. The meeting should provide an opportunity for students to become more familiar with the 'sights and sounds' of the local university campus; and
2. Students should be given some tangible recognition of their participation in the day's activities.

One product of the meeting was a combined list of the students' answers to six significant questions about their experience and views of the programs and arrangements that had been provided for them, and other students at risk, in each of the schools during 2000. Another product was a summary of the teachers' answers to the same questions. This was prepared on behalf of the group by one of the teachers who had contributed to the discussion. A third product was two short lists of similarities and differences between students' and teachers' views of the programs and arrangements provided in the four schools.

The Evaluation Data

The information and evidence collected during the course of this evaluation was largely data provided by teachers and students in and around the projects in the FSS Program. In each of the four schools, the teachers'/evaluators' own experience and perceptions of the effects of the projects represented a particularly important element of the evaluation data. Those perceptions were, nevertheless, disciplined by evidence provided by students, colleagues, and others close to the projects such as employers, private providers, and parents. The case record includes the following information collected by teachers about the effects of FSS Program projects in their schools:

- case studies of students describing how disengaged and disaffected youngsters began to change as a result of their participation in alternative programs;
- evaluation reports outlining teachers' perceptions of strengths and weaknesses of programs they were associated with;
- photographs, and reproductions of photographs, of students engaged in FSS Program activities;
- notes on positive comments made by employers with whom students had come in contact during work experience placements;
- observations written by school administrators noting positive features of the FSS Program they had observed, along with suggestions for improvement; and
- comments written by students about aspects of programs and arrangements they liked, and changes they would make if they could.

The case record also includes the following information about effects of FSS Program project across the four schools:

- a list of 16 students' combined answers to six significant questions about their experience and views of the programs and arrangements that were provided for them and other students at risk in each of the schools during 2000;
- a summary of nine teachers' answers to the same six questions;
- short lists of similarities and differences between students' and teachers' views to of the alternative programs;
- email messages from four teachers summarising their perceptions of what they had learned through their participation in the evaluation; and
- records of meeting compiled by the action research facilitator.

Findings and Recommendations for the FSS Program Project, and Schools

On the basis of the information and evidence collected during the course of this evaluation, it seems reasonable to say that a common conclusion reached by teachers and students in the four schools was that the programs and arrangements supported by the FSS Program funding were very successful. With regard to teachers, the evidence is that those in and around the FSS Program projects

implemented at *Provincial City College*, *North City College*, *Private City College*, and *South City College*, would substantially agree with a colleague who wrote:

> *It has been our experience that the vast majority of our students have relished their time (in the alternative program) resulting in significantly higher commitments to work; quite noticeable improved rates of learning with respect to literacy and numeracy skills, and improvements in normal classroom behaviour: the development of more positive relationships between teachers and students; and more cooperative attitudes from many students.*

There is also something like general agreement among teachers and students in the four schools that the FSS Programs projects have been successful because they have:

- given students a realistic second chance to complete their secondary education
- by providing them with the kind of educational opportunities *students* believe they want and deserve;
- defined success in relation to students' individual interests, needs and aspirations, rather than merely passing standard secondary school subjects;
- insisted that only staff who are genuinely interested in students and capable of demonstrating that they genuinely care about the education and welfare of students at risk, were employed in the alternative programs;
- included the development of appropriate skills, including skills needed in work experience placements and, beyond that, in real jobs; and
- recognised the impact of issues and situations in students' lives outside school and the necessity of providing appropriate assistance and support when needed, including access to appropriate social services and agencies.

In addition, student retention and students' enthusiasm for the alternative programs – effects and outcomes widely advanced as the most significant measures of success – are generally attributed to these programs being significantly different from other secondary school programs. The understanding is that what has encouraged students disillusioned with conventional secondary education to return to school and remain in alternative programs, is that they perceive these programs as being more:

- interesting, more fun and more engaging than conventional secondary school curricula;
- useful and practical, especially as a means of identifying pathways to future opportunities and life chances, including pathways to future employment;
- flexible and open to negotiation between learners and teachers;
- oriented to achievable objectives, success, and making school a more positive experience than normal secondary school programs that appear designed to fail a significant proportion of students;
- attentive to barriers to student achievement, and finding ways around those barriers;
- focussed on individual students, their particular needs, and providing appropriately individualised or tailored support and attention;

- concerned with providing students with the practical support they need in accessing external agencies and meeting out-of-school commitments;
- convivial, warm and receptive to the formation of friendship groups and developing a sense of identity and the feeling of belonging to a supportive group;
- consistent with participants being viewed positively by other students, including their younger peers; and last, but not least,
- more often taught by significant, supportive adults who are less directive, more personable, more innovative and who genuinely care about and are interested in students, their education and their welfare.

Given such findings it is not surprising that three common conclusions should emerge from the evaluation of the FSS Program projects in these four schools. They are that:

- the FSS Program should continue (or a similar program be put in its place);
- programs for students at risk of leaving school before completing their secondary education should include, as priorities, the development of students' numeracy and literacy skills; a significant work experience component; and the on-going development of self-esteem, confidence, and other related personal and social skills; and
- secondary schools be not only be encouraged, but adequately funded, to develop alternative programs for students at risk (and, therefore, that alternative funding options need to be investigated when funding for the FSS Program ceases at the end of 2000.)

In the light of the realisation that the FSS Program has run its course, it is not surprising either that, as one administrator put it, the 'number one concern' for the future is 'what happens when the funding dries up'.

Experiences, Learnings and Outcomes from the Action Research Process

Although the FSS Program evaluation was not depicted as a professional development activity as such, the evidence is that the seven teachers/evaluators who participated in the evaluation came to see it as a useful exercise in professional development. By the end of the evaluation, a common conclusion was that the study had been instrumental in increasing teachers' awareness of additional possibilities for improving the education of students at risk. One of the teachers/evaluators expressed that view in the following words:

> *For myself it (the evaluation) has opened my eyes more to other programs that are running, and that there are other ways in which we can cater for students who would be at risk.*

Another teacher advanced the same view when she concluded:

> *The formation of the (evaluation) network was extremely useful in not only exchanging ideas but also in our own professional development. I think we*

all feel that there has been some growth for our own schools from the contact and the generation of new ideas, and seeing which things have and have not worked.

A variation on the same theme included the observation that the FSS Program would have been enhanced if it had included similar opportunities for meetings between teachers from various schools involved in the Program. That view was described in terms of an opportunity missed. 'Meeting with other schools,' this teacher began,

has only occurred during the evaluation process. We feel that it would have been of more value if the schools involved had met right from the beginning of the FSS Program. In this way we could have shared ideas, resources, contacts, etc. Also, meeting with other schools could have helped to clarify our own concerns, and to, perhaps, see things from another perspective.

On the basis of the experience of working cooperatively across schools, the same teacher offered the opinion that:

Having someone as a facilitator and meeting perhaps once a semester (or even once a year): I would consider this to be extremely worthwhile in being able to help schools develop strategies to cope with students who are at risk, or to help cater for other individual students' needs.

A more particular consequence of the evaluation process, highlighted its meaning for students. One teacher thought that participating in the study had been a valuable experience for students because it had enabled them to make contact with 'other students undertaking similar courses or at similar levels'. Another believed that involving students in the evaluation 'gave them the opportunity to visit a university, which many in this program may not have considered as an option'. A third teacher thought that the evaluation had enabled her to appreciate the positive effects of involving students in such investigations. 'As we saw from the evaluation process', she reflected,

having the students involved was a very positive experience. Again, if the students could have met a lot earlier, they may have gained a lot more.

Despite the positive features associate with cross-school meetings, the somewhat pessimistic conclusion was that this practice was unlikely to continue. 'We feel', one teacher wrote,

that it is unlikely for any meetings between the schools to continue as funding will not be available for travel and time release.

Final Comment

It is puzzling that, even before this evaluation of the effects of the FSS Program projects at *Provincial City College*, *North City College*, *Private City College*, and *South City College* began, it was clear that the Commonwealth had decided to cease funding the FSS Program.

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7 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS: EVALUATING THE VICTORIAN FULL SERVICE SCHOOLS PROGRAM

The following evaluation of the impact of the Full Service Schools for Students at Risk Program was made by respondents to the second questionnaire. In general, it was thought that FSS Program funding, while still insufficient to meet all needs, had made a considerable difference to schools and students. It was said that some 'wonderful ideas have come from the staff', and the networks have now been established, even though funds may no longer continue. The FSS Program was seen as a 'catalyst' for change, and that it would be 'great' to 'keep the collaboration going' and continue to share ideas. It was important to strive to maintain successful practices. Thus 'having the funding worked'. It meant that schools were able to pay for services and reach out to agencies for assistance. It had 'made schools stop and think' and provided alternative ways of doing things and, indeed, 'a model of how things can be done'. Below, outcomes of the funding and impetus provided by the FSS Program are summarised and illustrated.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE: OUTCOMES OF THE FULL SERVICE SCHOOLS PROGRAM

Re-engagement in learning for disconnected students

The dominant indicator for respondents to the preliminary questionnaire that the FSS Program was improving the chances of at risk students staying in school was an enhanced level of participation by this group of students in their programs. Other prominent indicators were: signs of improvement in attitude, confidence, self-esteem and enjoyment; positive staff and student feedback; success experiences and improved attendance. For example, SWCs in discussions at BAYSA noted that 'at risk kids' are often absent from school on Mondays; when the BAYSA program was shifted to Monday, however, attendance increased dramatically.

Respondents to the second questionnaire saw that this had occurred through a range of specially staffed and delivered alternative programs and activities, enjoying the numerous benefits of the newly established networks between schools and support agencies and employers. Typical comments were:

... a significant result in terms of employability and social skills for a number of students who were previously unengaged. (Ballarat)

Development of an extensive network of employers who will place students in employment. Funding to subscribe to an adventure camp. (Casey/ Dandenong).

Links with local agencies and input to curriculum and policy planning by youth workers and other staff. Positive experiences and skill development for young people through the activity developed. (Darebin/Moreland)

Retention of at risk low literacy students; provision of small specialised classes specially targeted to the needs of these students; funding of outsourced courses and subsidy for camps/activities; funding of tutors and aides for the program. (East Gippsland/Latrobe/Wellington)

In Area Network Committee focus groups, it was noted that students who might have dropped out of education and training altogether are now going into TAFE courses, or are experiencing increased community access. They are also able to be tracked. For example, as one person said:

They don't just disappear. A lot of the kids have been ringing to say 'I just wanted to let you know that I've got this or I've got that'. And these are kids that initially would have walked out the door, or (been) *thrown out* (and suspended) *... we're competing with that discipline thing all the time. But at least they know that when they come back that you're not going to change your attitude towards them, that they're still part of it. ... And the first thing they say is 'what have you got planned for us this term – what's the next thing?' So there is that connectedness there. That's been the big advantage of Full Service Schools.*

Extended curriculum options for students

In one Program Area, it was noted in the focus group that extra staff made a considerable difference to extending options for students:

... it costs us in terms of offering another curriculum option at VCE level. ... If you had another one and a half or two staff allocated to your college, you could do wonderful things.

Targeting funds specifically for students at risk helps to focus on the issue and put strategies into place. The fact that the FSS Program 'forced (us) to earmark some of our funds' has led to some very successful outcomes. It was also said that a similar focus needs to be placed on developing literacy, and vocational learning requires additional funds.

Funding for special activities

It was noted by one school in a focus group that it was only because of FSS Program money that groups of students at middle-school level had been able to

attend the local TAFE institute for a range of activities. One person explained the advantages of such excursions for the students:

> *For a lot of kids it's comforting to get them into a* (more relaxed independent learning environment), *that is, transporting themselves somewhere, going to a different campus, ... not having to wear uniform, ... being able to have a cigarette at recess and lunchtime without having somebody jumping down their throats. And having somebody come out to see them and then being really excited to see you there because they want to show you what they are doing. That's largely the benefit of going off-campus one day a week or so. And they get the envy of other kids too, in terms of ... they can come back and say 'This is what we did, this is what we're doing'.*

Designated people in schools to work with students

Area Network Committee members noted that some schools have used the FSS Program money to pay for tuition fees, a teacher to work with at risk students more intensively, and youth workers. (One school with high numbers of at risk students had engaged two youth workers). It was said, however, that 'this is still not enough because it covers the welfare aspect but not the curriculum aspect'. A common theme amongst those responding to the second questionnaire, who reported that new links were 'developing well', was that getting started requires funds. These had enabled employment of a field/network coordinator or youth worker who made the connections and assisted communication between schools, agencies and young people. Often these people brought contacts and networks with them to the position. Similarly, funding bought teacher time and positions of responsibility to set up alternative programs, and provided an 'identifiable contact in the school (student welfare coordinator) and a regular ongoing youth worker'. Funding also bought time that enabled a dedicated person/s to interview students and teachers to travel and 'get out and talk to groups and invite them to contribute to planning'.

Increase in teacher flexibility

It was reported in a focus group that, as a result of seeing changes in the students and the directions they were taking, many teachers were seen to be changing to become a bit more flexible in the classroom.

> *These kids are probably not your most favorite in the classroom, and teachers who are sticklers for procedure and don't like to sway too far away from the timetable and want their assessments in on time and so forth are becoming more and more and more willing to be flexible, and modify* (core) *programs, because they can see the benefits.*

Acceptance of alternative pathways for students

In one Area Program, it was noted that having the money available to focus on early school leaving has generally increased teachers' acceptance of alternative pathways for students. This acceptance has led to schools adding to FSS Program money to expand or continue successful programs that began under the banner of

FSS. One school had moved from offering 'special programs' for students at risk once a term to realising that 'they need to be accommodated right throughout the year' and supplementing FSS funds from other sources to provide more comprehensive programs:

> *You can't do a one-off thing and then* (say) *'you've had your turn, I've got to put somebody else on the list to be funded'. ... So I think it's enabled something to be happening throughout the whole year and to supplement other funds. And from our point of view that's been really good and we've actually nursed along students that are now in pre-apprenticeships and pre-employment. And had we not been able to do that, they just would have been troublemakers at school and probably dropped out.*
>
> *I think* (it's) *the flexibility that maybe enabled it to fill some of the gaps* (where) *some of the other funding arrangements were strained.*

Another school had used the money to fund a 0.6 position for a teacher to run their program:

> *Now the college actually puts in an extra 1.5 of staffing into the program overall. But it came at the time when we'd just been trying to review the new* (school) *charter ... The need to provide something for these kids who were finding difficulty with their way through the VCE was one of our charter goals. The* (FSS) *initiative ... to develop a program with some funding attached to it was enough to set it off. Now that funding dries up at the end of this year, well, it's dried up now, ... it seems fairly likely that the college will continue to fund this program through next year.* (We have done a) *staff evaluation on it and it's all positives coming back from the staff that these kids need* (these sorts of programs). *So it's got a cultural change in a way that we should be providing not only for them, but for those who are less academic and the ones who are struggling. So it's been a catalyst I guess, in a way.*

Similarly, one country respondent thought, 'now the benefits (of running ACE programs) are understood, the school may be willing to continue and use the global budget'.

Acknowledgement and respite for teachers

Many teachers have been battling for some years to provide alternative programs for at risk students and the FSS Program funding was said to have acknowledged and supported their work. As one person reported in a focus group:

> *I've been in the profession for many years ... and frankly I'm tired. It's a battle... You might have the goodwill but you just don't have the energy and so you are put in a position where you do have to prioritise and you just don't get everything done. That's why having the money for programs such as these provides some respite and at least someone is aware that if we had the resources we really could make a difference – if we just had the resources.*

Increasing community awareness of the need to act

It was also noted in a focus group that funding had bought time (and personnel) for a concerted effort to be made towards cultural change. For example:

> *We have paid a parent to come in and work with students on an individual basis so they can go and talk to other parents. We have also appointed a coordinator and given* (this person some time), *and now we want to target more teachers from all faculties so they can talk about it so it becomes more widely accepted* (as an issue) *and not just the responsibility of the student welfare coordinator.*

From networks to communities of practice

Working together on a common issue that affects neighbouring schools and their broader communities, particularly in a provincial setting (see also p. 79), was said to have led to deeper understanding of early school leaving and what can be done about it. Hearing other people's stories about successes provides meaning and encouragement and broadens the pool of useful community and funding resources:

> *I think it would it be fair to say that most schools* (in the region) *are trying to cater for students at risk. The Full Service Schools* (have done) *a lot more in terms of programs and linkages and also to be able to share what they're doing with other schools through network meetings, visiting other schools, and seeing exactly what they're doing that they can take back to their schools. So in that sense, not only the programs but linking with the community and linking between schools are also* (important).

There were also signs that community resources were being used more effectively, as new knowledge and understandings were generated:

> *I think the community resources are being used much better because ... for example, JPP programs have access to links through GBGT* (group training) *... and that's* (happened through) *schools sharing* (information) *about the fact that the program is there and it's been successful. So I think groups like GBGT and Eaglehawk Training Station are being utilised more because of word of mouth ... we've done Business Admin. and Hospitality through Eaglehawk Training Station but Golden Square* (Secondary College) *has got them doing a food handling course. And so by hearing about providers from other people working in schools, I think that we're now using our community resources much better.*
>
> *... sometimes you have a vague idea about what you want but you don't know where to access the sort of program you want, or how to go about it, and that's why this sort of network and sharing* (helps).
>
> *I guess it supports both the agency and the school and the student in that it keeps them going if they can access funding for a particular area. ... we're looking at setting up a program at GBGT* (group training) *for some Koori*

students, who are in an area where they can see some benefits for themselves. GBGT will obviously assist the Koori students and us here in our school as well. It's interesting.

FUTURE PLANNING

In looking towards further planning, the following issues were discussed.

Building on current programs

In general, it was thought that a policy of prevention rather than intervention was desirable and that, if funding were available, current projects could be built upon. Extending the programs that have been available to a small group of students to many more was also seen to be desirable. Most respondents to the second questionnaire reported that an increased range of vocational and 'more hands-on' courses are either being planned or are in place in their schools for students in Years 10, 11 and 12. In one case there was a 'VET explosion'. These courses, it was said, are generally taken by students as part of a VCE program and some include one day of work experience each week. One respondent said that there was increased recognition of modules undertaken at TAFE. Others indicated that pathways programs that have a work focus are also being planned or are already in place for Year 9 students.

The success of 'alternative' or 'modified' programs at Year 10 has led to some schools implementing them in the early years of secondary school as well. Typically, these programs are described as having a practical 'hands-on learning' focus and include a broad range of electives or access to 'outsourced' courses to encourage students to follow their interests. They also include literacy and numeracy classes tailored to meet the needs of the students involved. Two courses cited as examples are the CGEA and the Certificate of Work Education. Many of these programs also have a strong personal development component. Students are also case managed to provide them with extra assistance in their studies or to make and review individual plans.

A number of Area Programs, however, mentioned that more curriculum-based work in literacy and numeracy, to build success for students at risk, was necessary. Consolidation and/or expansion of present programs, and the opportunity to evaluate and improve them were also mentioned, together with the professional development of staff. Yet it was noted that it is often difficult to find appropriate professional development that provides teachers with the expertise to work with at risk students.

It was thought by some that Years 9 and 10 programs for all students should be revamped, for example, students working with fewer teachers. Some teachers also felt that continuing to network, share stories and talk to colleagues were important. As a general policy principle, the possibility of extending the FSS concept to include health services, JPP and local councils, so that it is more

integrated, was also mentioned. Some people felt that local councils need to be encouraged to do more – some councils do very little. In addition, good principles and practices needed to be documented and disseminated, for example, through the use of CDs and a website.

The importance of continuing to share with other schools was emphasised, as was working with local business. Schools needed to become an integral part of the post compulsory network. In addition, youth and family support, helping young people deal with relationships and emotional problems still needed to be increased and integrated into school programs, so that students feel a sense of connectedness. Pastoral care was seen to be different from welfare in that the former fosters connectedness through positive relationships with teachers and engagement with learning. To achieve this, school environments needed to be more positive places generally.

Extending vocational options and raising the status of this area of learning was seen as crucial in providing inclusive curriculum. Two people commented:

> *We'd like to see our Vocational Pathways Program be a success. For a number of years now we have been offering VCE Psychology, 1 and 2 Biology and Maths* (to Year 10 students). *Here's an opportunity for another group of kids to get credits and recognition. ... You realise that you really need to improve your pathways program within the school. I guess, for so long, as a 7-10 school, CSF* (Curriculum Standards Framework) *has been our main feature – I guess, a bit of a driving force, in the curriculum. And the welfare side of it has lagged a bit behind. But, in fact, ... although we tried to change that over recent years, I think our welfare area is still in a fix-it mode. ... whereas, I think teachers need to take on a greater pathways training program.*

> *We're trying to tackle more at a junior level so that kids not only learn better but feel better generally about themselves. ...We've got a lot of kids where school is the only positive place for them and that's what has been great about making it a good year for them with these special programs and additional funding. Some of those kids were real drop out potential from home and family as well as their lack of skills and their ability to fit in with the mainstream program. But I think the idea of building a pathways program is something that we would most certainly like to do.*

Funding issues

In responding to the second questionnaire, a little over 24% of respondents believed that the activities initiated in the FSS Program were either 'mostly sustainable or 'highly sustainable'. Yet, of these, less than 3% recorded a 'highly sustainable' return. Reasons offered by respondents for their choice of category focused mainly on the retention of the newly established networks, supplementary funding anticipated from other sources, the raised awareness of school administration and staff of the extent of the problem, and the anticipation that meeting the needs of

these students will continue to develop as a priority for the school. Typical comments were:

> *Contacts/networks will continue.* (Brimbank/Hume)

> *The value of Work Skills program funded by FSS has significantly increased the self-esteem of students and their willingness to complete education. It has been well received by employers who are less hesitant about accepting at risk students.* (Bendigo)

> *Staff understand how the program works and have learnt from the experience. Resources purchased like classroom materials and professional development can support the program next year.* (Casey/Dandenong)

Yet even the respondents who believe the activities to be 'mostly sustainable' have concerns about the funding implications:

> *Funding and staffing are an issue. The good/willing staff are burning out and there is an unwillingness by others to take on these difficult kids with no extra help/support/time available.* (Frankston/Peninsula)

Problems of loss of funding

The main reason offered by the 74% of respondents who saw their activities as 'not sustainable' or 'sustainable to some extent' concerned the loss of FSS Program funding. Respondents identified outsourced programs that incur additional costs to the school, time release for teachers and the cost of support staff/agencies as major resource items reliant on additional funding. Typical comments included:

> *We used our FSS money to employ a youth worker at 0.6 EFT, this money has now ceased and so too will this position.* (Brimbank/Hume)

> *Staff will not be allocated to such programs without extra funding.* (Frankston/Peninsula)

> *Without the money to pay for taxis and the training/course delivery, our students will miss out. Most of the students involved come from poor families.* (Ballarat)

Respondents who recorded 'sustainable to some extent' generally indicated that the scale of the activities would be curtailed and that, in many cases, even this would be reliant on some funding from other sources, including fees charged to students.

At the end of the FSS Program funding period, the histories of each of the networks appeared to vary both in length and nature. Some schools and agencies have worked collaboratively since the outset, realising that, collectively, they represent a broader range of expertise and funding networks than each of them could ever do as individual entities. To continue to provide the necessary personnel and infrastructure, however, for example coordinators and youth workers, they require the certainty of ongoing funding. Their responses suggest that much good work

and successful programs will not continue if funding is not forthcoming. Those networks with longer histories of success and strategic collaboration (Ballarat, Bendigo, Greater Geelong, East Gippsland/Latrobe/Wellington and perhaps Casey/Dandenong) would argue that this model should be supported financially so that local communities have some control and certainty in making longer term plans for infrastructure to address the particular circumstances of local young people. For example:

> *Give appropriate funding to service effective networks – this funding needs to cover network management and allow for the funding of specialist programs. School-based programs are needed in conjunction with programs to pick up students when they exit the school system.*

Problems of short-term funding

In the Area Network Committee focus groups the point was made that FSS Program funding had made it possible to launch many programs without cutting into other learning area budgets. Once funding is removed, however, such programs would become very vulnerable. It was said that schools are unlikely to be able to afford to employ youth workers and transition workers who are so crucial to the success of many programs and that some programs needed to expand. Indeed, programs for at risk students and community development seemed to rely too much on the goodwill of the personnel involved, without this being matched with adequate resources. The FSS Program had filled that gap to some extent. But the importance of knowing what funding is available well in advance so that strategic, long-term planning can take place was emphasised. Much frustration was expressed in regard to uncertainty about continuing funding.

Speaking also of funding, student welfare coordinators at BAYSA noted that, if students have to move to a new person because funding means that a youth worker has to leave, they 'won't adapt as well the second time'. Everyone needs to know that a program can last for at least two years. In addition, not knowing whether funding will continue limits innovation. Of FSS Program funding, in particular, one person noted that her school would have been unable to cope with school returnees had this money not been made available. It was explained that, while the MARS (the Motivation and Retention of Students) program for Years 7-10 students is funded for two years, most submissions for funding have to be made on a yearly basis. Funding comes from many sources – for example, schools contribute some money and there is FSS Program money too for the SSSP (Senior Students Support Project).

A major problem reported, however, is that, until recently, only Human Services funding has been available for Youth Services, not DEET funding. It was stressed that it is very important that DETYA and DEET recognise the importance of early intervention in retaining early school leavers, and funds it. It was noted that BAYSA is a non-profit organisation, adopting a 'Service Model' of provision, rather than a 'Welfare Model'. Yet it needs either a philanthropic trust or a benefactor to survive. A 'funding vein' is needed. Youth Services for students at risk is a 'black

hole' in funding, falling as it does between Human Services and Education. Two major problems are that:

- if funding collapses, trust that has been built up with students may be destroyed when they are told that the program cannot continue; and
- BAYSA is so busy delivering services that they have insufficient time to promote what they do; thus nine months are spent working while for three months they are pre-occupied with obtaining further funding.

They felt, however, that some continuity was maintained through BAYSA personnel, those people who have 'always been around, and so they know the faces; they know who we are and we always work together so that they know what it's about'. Asked about developing relationships with schools, it was acknowledged that it takes time to build up good working relationships with so many teachers (hundreds in four or five different schools) and to understand how each school is run. It's particularly important to know who the main teachers are 'and the ones that kids have problems with ... and that takes time as well'. Again, this is disrupted through loss of continuity in funding.

In the Bendigo Area Network Committee focus group, it was said that the biggest barrier to people with goodwill who want to work with each other is short-term funding. However, one person made the point that 'we have to accept that that may not change' and that the community needs to establish priorities for the necessary resources it can provide 'regardless of what happens to partnerships and funding ... so we've got some sort of a base to work from'. Then, additional sources of funding can be used to augment these.

> *And so it's moving from being reactive (which we have been) to being positive and initiating, charting a course and saying, 'well, this is what we want to do' and even if that just says 'well, we want to do this but we can't'. At least that says, 'OK, we'll go out now and talk to people who we suspect may be useful partners and may have funds available to them'. I think ... we're aware at least that that's what we have to do.*

This led to a comment about the need for community groups to anticipate trends and sources of funding to re-shape programs to fit funding guidelines, but based on core values and directions:

> *Under the heading youth or whatever ... we have to be smart as a community and find out where* (the funding is) *coming from. So you still have your base – your network is the same, or your core is the same, but you've got your feelers out there so we can tap into it through a variety of agencies, whether they be your employment agencies or whether they be through your local council, or your youth or health networks. However, you need some sort of core.*

Another barrier associated with funding is training costs for young people under 18:

> *TAFE ... won't look at students if they're under 18 in some instances* (and) *cost is prohibitive for these young people to improve their training.*

Yet another barrier is the 'silo' factor of limitations surrounding responsibilities of different government departments to particular population groups.

> *Waters are always fairly murky as to where you can slot a kid into, or you might access continuing education for (an employment) program, but they'll say 'no, they have to be registered through Centrelink'. So, to actually get that kid into Centrelink is very difficult. So JPP fills a great role. I think we're asking them to do things often that are even outside their parameters of how they're operating and so I agree with them that the link person, the advocate is very, very important and I think that we have an ideal situation (to) get our act together to actually set that up.*

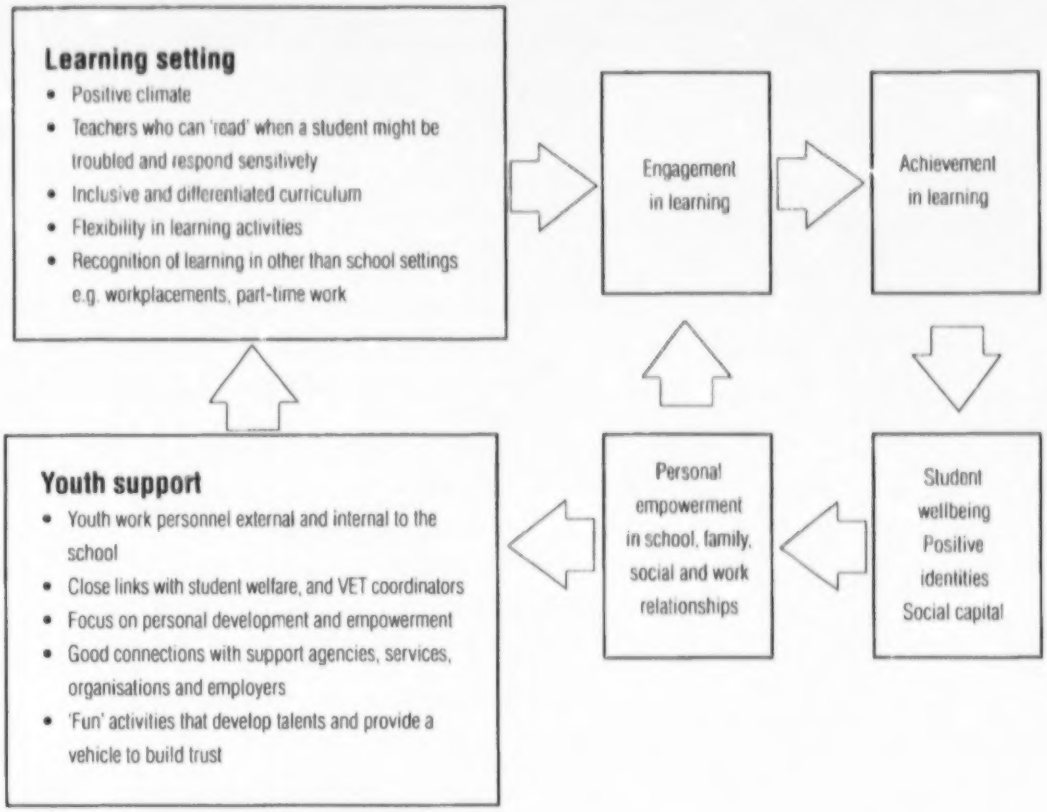
AN INTEGRATED APPROACH FOR POTENTIAL EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS

A major theme that emerged throughout the data was that efforts towards providing for students at risk had the purpose of building 'social capital' in schools and communities, thus enabling students to produce their own social capital, while developing positive identities of competence and confidence and a sense of wellbeing in the process. These outcomes are realised through engagement and achievement in learning and personal empowerment towards making the transition to adulthood successfully. Making positive connections between students and the adults involved in these programs, thus reconnecting them to school, and making and sustaining connections between schools and agencies and other organisations, are crucial to this work. Below, a diagram is shown depicting some of the factors that support the effectiveness of the FSS projects and programs towards these outcomes.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

1. Potential early school leavers are a diverse group. While some may have a history of academic failure, and/or behavioural difficulties, others may be succeeding reasonably well in school but have to 'drop out' because family and other support structures are absent. Loss of family support has many ramifications for a young person's achievement in school and, indeed, a web of mutually influencing factors may lead to a decision to leave. Early intervention (from Years 7 and 8) is vital in preventing initial problems from becoming more serious.

Model Showing An Integrated Approach for Potential Early School Leavers


Learning setting
• Positive climate
• Teachers who can 'read' when a student might be troubled and respond sensitively
• Inclusive and differentiated curriculum
• Flexibility in learning activities
• Recognition of learning in other than school settings e.g. workplacements, part-time work
Engagement in learning
Achievement in learning
Youth support
• Youth work personnel external and internal to the school
• Close links with student welfare, and VET coordinators
• Focus on personal development and empowerment
• Good connections with support agencies, services, organisations and employers
• 'Fun' activities that develop talents and provide a vehicle to build trust
Personal empowerment in school, family, social and work relationships
Student wellbeing
Positive identities
Social capital

Recommendation 1

That the use of current indicators and procedures for identifying potential early leavers, through a variety of coordination and assessment functions within schools (for example, pastoral groups, welfare and year level coordination, feeder school reports) be strengthened and extended to ensure that early assessments and prompt interventions are made, accompanied by appropriate advice for students and their parents.

2. Many types of projects and programs have the capacity to engage young people, foster employability skills and encourage them to change their attitudes to continuing in school. For success, such projects and programs need to include:
   - personal support (by individual adults, for example, youth workers, case managers, teachers, ar l supportive environments in the classroom and the workplace);
   - inclusive and differentiated curriculum designed around group and individual student needs and capacities (for example, referring particular students to external agencies and organisations for specific programs, or providing school-based, often practical, hands-on programs into which students self-select); and
   - regular, relevant work experience.

Recommendation 2

That schools be supported to identify the needs and capacities of individual potential early school leavers so that they can develop a comprehensive range of services, courses and programs for both individuals and groups. Funding for personnel especially designated to coordinate and undertake this crucial work within the school (for example, case managers, youth workers, student welfare and VET coordinators) should be a priority.

3. Critical success factors in alternative programs are:
    - extra help in small classes (a maximum of 20 students), with teachers who are friendly, caring, patient and sensitive, listen well and use positive discipline;
    - activities that build confidence; these might include contributing to program development, engaging in 'public' speaking, expressing opinions that are taken seriously, 'adventure' activities and preparing for job interviews;
    - activities that provide opportunities for 'success' experiences;
    - positive relationships between the students and the adults involved;
    - opportunities to learn new life and work skills;
    - personal development activities that enhance self and cultural awareness;
    - opportunities to make new friends and learn 'people skills' for team-work and family and school life, enhancing a feeling of connectedness to school;
    - activities and subjects that are clearly seen to be helpful for the future, for example, vocationally oriented programs and work placements; and
    - counselling and medical, financial and legal advice, as appropriate.

Recommendation 3

That particular attention be given to providing students at risk with smaller classes (a maximum of 20 students), and a small group of selected teachers with whom they can develop close, positive relationships. A secure environment and challenging activities that engage every facet of the young person's intellectual, emotional and social development need to be provided.

4. Where choices to enter alternative programs, or shape them in a particular direction, are provided for young people, they respond more positively to the process of entry and, often, to the programs themselves. Also, many of these programs are valuable for all students and those who do not participate may feel 'short-changed' and miss important opportunities.

Recommendation 4

That students (and their parents) be involved in electing to participate in alternative programs. Even if recommended to students as a very good option for them, the element of choice needs to be maintained. In addition, alternative programs and pathways need to be more widely advertised, and treated as a normal part of

school provision (for example, through letters to all parents and information evenings) so that all students can benefit from the opportunities provided and community attitudes towards such programs can be influenced. Similarly, the process of choosing needs to be built into the programs themselves (for example, choice of work placement, the negotiation of curriculum etc.), to empower students in decision-making and taking control over their own lives, and thus assisting them in the transition to responsible adulthood.

5. Developing and maintaining school and community links are vital in meeting the needs of potential early leavers. Schools alone cannot provide a 'Full Service'. Such links are many and varied and include those with other schools, community agencies, TAFE, the adult education and university sectors, group training organisations and industry. Some students are best served by programs and personnel being brought into the school (often youth support), thus mainstreaming them. Others benefit by learning to negotiate their way outside the school and the provision of a different setting in which to make a 'fresh start'.

Recommendation 5

That current links with outside agencies and organisations established by schools and Area Networks be maintained and extended, with attempts being made to integrate services and programs comprehensively across a particular region through, for example, Local Learning and Employment Networks as they become operational. Further collaboration between schools should also be sought. Some programs need to be organised within schools, particularly when students are reluctant or afraid to go elsewhere. Others, particularly those associated with vocational learning and education, are often better accessed off-campus, but giving due regard to individual needs and local circumstances.

6. Critical success factors in forming and enabling school and community links include the following:
   - a shared obligation to assist young people and develop clear objectives and goals for the network;
   - a Steering Committee of some kind, to develop joint ownership of the collaborative project, set strategic directions and coordinate continual monitoring of the project;
   - well-established procedures and protocols, acceptable to all parties, to disseminate information about what is occurring for the young people involved, thus promoting good relationships and effective communication;
   - key personnel as 'brokers' (for example, student welfare coordinators, youth workers, case managers, VET coordinators), most productively located for at least some time in the schools, who can make and maintain the links between students, schools and other agencies, who are at ease with all groups and who can translate the language of the agencies and social workers, or TAFEs and industry, into one that teachers can understand;

- modified school structures and whole school support of the programs being offered, achieved through the professional development of teachers and the leadership of senior personnel; and
- the use of Local Government Area geographical boundaries as a way of designating all the key players at the local level responsible for education and training and youth services if these are to be coordinated.

Recommendation 6

That where schools and other agencies and organisations frequently work together to provide for students at risk, a local Steering Committee be established, to provide conditions for developing joint ownership of the project, common purposes and understandings, evaluation guidelines and clear protocols and procedures to facilitate communication and good relationships among all parties.

7. Different approaches are used by professionals in working with young people, and shared understandings of each other's culture will not occur without specific strategies being put in place. Interprofessional collaboration is vital in the support of at risk young people.

Recommendation 7

That the employment of youth workers, case managers, student welfare and VET coordinators (or other informed personnel in schools) be continued and extended to assist in making and maintaining links with other agencies and organisations. It should be recognised that their work also includes the professional development of other staff, promoting understanding and communication between all parties, and in maintaining regular contact.

8. The FSS Program attempted to locate responsibility for the sharing of resources, programs and support within a designated Local Government Area or combinations of these. This has allowed new players, such as local government, to take an active role in support of students at risk and has optimised the value of networking across schools and other providers.

Recommendation 8

That Local Government Areas (LGAs) be recognised as the geographical areas where responsibility for youth is located so that services and education and training provision can be aligned. Coordination of a comprehensive range of programs and services in a given area should be a high priority of Local Learning and Employment Networks as they begin operation so that young people have learning experiences and support which help them to be successful.

9. Work placements and work experiences are a crucial component of many alternative programs in developing employability skills that lead to meaningful employment and in changing students' attitudes to school and work. These

placements and experiences, however, are not always relevant either to the young person or to the local labour market, and supportive and non-exploitative employers are not always easy to find.

Recommendation 9

That while students should maintain an element of choice in the matter of work placements and experience, schools attempt to ensure that such placements are relevant, supportive and not exploitative of the young people involved. New links between schools and employers, group training companies and employer groups need to be developed, to offer more opportunities for part-time apprenticeships and traineeships. This is particularly crucial in areas of local labour shortages. A variety of strategies also need to be put in place (preparation, mentoring, debriefings etc.) to maximise the educational value of the experience for young people.

10. While some strategies are in place to monitor the progress of early leavers after dropping out of school, this process is somewhat ad hoc. Schools have never had the resources or personnel to undertake this work, nor have they been given this responsibility. Yet such tracking is a vitally important task in understanding young people's employment destinations, in encouraging them to return to school or to undertake further education and training and in preventing some young people from 'falling through the cracks'.

Recommendation 10

That Local Learning and Employment Networks facilitate collaboration across schools and other agencies, to maintain contact with young people who have left school before the end of Year 12. Skilled personnel, funding and other resources are needed. Although such designated groups may vary across regions, DEET should be involved in coordinating this effort and ensure that appropriate funding is provided. Collaborative arrangements are to be preferred over individual responsibility that tends to rely on the goodwill of already overworked staff.

11. The most desirable situation for potential early leavers is one in which flexible, multiple, interacting curriculum pathways are provided by schools and outside agencies and organisations, with all of these pathways being seen as equally valid educational offerings to be financed by the school. Structural changes, such as time-tabling, to accommodate work placements and agency programs, and whole school policies concerning discipline and welfare, need to support these pathways. This situation can dispel the problems of labelling and the acquisition of negative identities for students in alternative programs that are seen as marginal to mainstream school life. This flexibility appears to be rare, however, and for its realisation, requires considerable cultural and structural change to occur within most schools.

Recommendation 11

That schools work towards developing flexible, multiple, interacting curriculum pathways in conjunction with other schools, agencies and organisations, and adopt new strategies for monitoring and assessing students at risk. Thus alternative programs should become central to mainstream curriculum rather than supplementary. These curriculum pathways need to be supported by appropriate 'whole school' policies and structural changes.

12. Cultural change in schools (and the community) needs to occur on a number of levels. Such change is effected through further involvement of parents and mainstream teachers with alternative program issues and professional development, particularly for those teachers who signal a willingness to participate in some way. Short contact with large numbers of students (both in class and across many classes), however, makes it difficult for mainstream teachers to develop the kinds of relationships necessary for effective learning for students at risk.

Recommendation 12

That professional development for teachers be provided to assist them in communicating constructively with all students and recognising individual differences in needs and learning styles. Such professional development might occur in many ways, as suited to individual teacher needs, for example, through group learning with a facilitator, action research, well-designed program evaluation, mentoring, visiting other classes or schools, or a Statewide Forum, as well as through seminars and workshops. All teachers need to be informed about the positive outcomes of these programs and, in addition, experience the 'pay-offs' for themselves. Such professional development should be supported by funding for time release. Initial teacher education should also give a high priority to teaching students at risk.

13. Structural change and whole school policy revisions need to accompany the provision of alternative pathways for students, if many potential early leavers are not to be labelled, miss important classes and generally become marginalised within the school. Such change is essential to provide smaller classes for students at risk, and a smaller number of teachers to take the major responsibility for them.

Recommendation 13

That schools endeavour to effect structural and whole school change towards accommodating and providing for the needs and capacities of all school students, including those of potential early leavers, by:

- *providing major blocks of time (days, half-days) in which all students and teachers can work together without interruption, thus accommodating off-campus alternative programs and work placements, and allowing good student-teacher relationships to develop;*

- *reducing class sizes, particularly for potential early leavers, so that teachers are able to provide their students with sufficient attention and support;*
- *deploying staff in such a way that only a small core team of people is required to take responsibility for a group of at risk students; and*
- *reconceptualising whole school welfare and discipline policies for the benefit of potential early leavers and mainstream students generally.*

14. Provision for students with very low levels of skill (particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy) is still quite inadequate in most regions. Early intervention is needed and programs designed to incorporate the development of literacy and numeracy skills in a variety of creative ways, while accommodating the differences between individuals and groups. These may involve partnerships with other providers, such as Adult and Community Education. In addition, many teachers are not sufficiently skilled in these areas to be able to assist students adequately.

Recommendation 14

That the assessment of skill levels in literacy and numeracy be strengthened, with the purpose of early intervention for those with difficulties, using programs especially designed to meet the needs of particular groups (and individuals), where possible in partnership with other providers. While the work of designated people (and parents) within schools is crucial, professional development for teachers generally in the area of literacy and numeracy enhancement should also be given priority.

15. Full Service Schools Program funding has led to the following (to different degrees) in many areas:
    - improved retention rates through the re-engagement of potential early leavers;
    - better preparation for students who do leave school;
    - extended curriculum options for students;
    - structural changes, such as re-timetabling and organising smaller class sizes for alternative programs;
    - new positions being created and opportunities for case management;
    - an increase in teacher flexibility generally;
    - acknowledgement and respite for teachers who have been 'battling' for years to provide alternative programs, for example, providing them with release time;
    - development of important community links;
    - increased community awareness about the need to care for at risk students;
    - increased acceptance of alternative pathways for students; and
    - the development of strong learning communities from fragmented networks.

Some of the programs and community-school links already established are sustainable and can be built upon, with a key factor in sustainability being the extent to which there is a shift in school culture to embrace programs for at risk

students. In addition, in regions where collaborative development is well advanced, usually provincial centres, working intersectorally has broadened the scope for applying to a range of different funding sources to address common concerns, and community resources appear to be used more effectively as a result of these collaborative efforts.

Yet many Area Programs are in early stages of development, are very dependent on further funding and cannot be sustained without it. Their limited resources are spread too thinly to meet competing demands, affecting other courses and groups of students. They particularly need money to fund: external courses and services for students; case management, involving teacher time and/or the employment of youth workers; alternative programs with smaller groups that require additional teacher time; and transport. Those Area Programs that are better developed need funding to supplement their current pool of resources. The problems of uncertainty, given the short-term nature of much of the funding provided, are also particularly disruptive to programs and thus to the wellbeing of students. Strategic community-school links take time to develop. In addition, the separation of the responsibilities of the Department of Human Services and the Department of Education, Employment and Training means that policy initiatives and funding arrangements are not coordinated, thus working against a comprehensive 'Full Service' for young people.

Recommendation 15

That further funding be provided, according to particular area requirements, and be committed over a period of at least two years, to resource programs and arrangements that are known to have a positive influence on schools and young people at risk. Funding to increase access to such programs across school communities should be made available, while retaining important features of programs such as small class sizes. The positions of case managers and youth workers in schools must be seen as a funding priority, as should literacy and numeracy programs, and the professional development of teachers towards the acquisition of new skills and attitudes and cultural change within the schools. It is a false economy to deny funding for programs that have such positive social and likely long-term economic outcomes. In addition, coordination of policy initiatives and funding arrangements between the Department of Human Services and the Department of Education, Employment and Training and other relevant departments should be effected.

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APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE ONE

Full Service Schools Program Victorian Statewide Evaluation

Survey of School and Community Personnel March 2000

(Please return by 17 March)

The purpose of this survey is to find out how school and community personnel have developed strategies for:

a) retaining students at risk of dropping out of education and training;
b) locating those young people who have already dropped out of school and are not engaged in meaningful work, education or training; and
c) engaging early school leavers in further education and training.

Area Network in which Full Service School Project is located

- ☐ 1 Brimbank/Hume
- ☐ 2 Casey/Dandenong
- ☐ 3 Darebin/Moreland
- ☐ 4 Frankston/Peninsula
- ☐ 5 Ballarat
- ☐ 6 Bendigo
- ☐ 7 East Gippsland/Latrobe/Wellington
- ☐ 8 Greater Geelong

Which Best Describes School Location?

- ☐ 1 Metropolitan
- ☐ 2 Provincial
- ☐ 3 Rural

Education System

- ☐ 1 Government
- ☐ 2 Catholic
- ☐ 3 Independent

What is your main role in the school?

- ☐ 1 Principal/Senior Administrator
- ☐ 2 Student Welfare Coordinator
- ☐ 3 Careers Coordinator
- ☐ 4 VET Coordinator
- ☐ 5 Classroom teacher
- ☐ 6 Other (please specify): _____

Question 1

Please briefly describe the nature of the Full Service Schools project/program in which you play a role.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Question 2

Please tick one of the boxes below.

☐ This is a new project/ program.

☐ *This project/program existed before the Full Service Schools Program was established.*

Question 3

The purpose of the Full Service Schools Program is to develop strategies that lead to reduced youth unemployment through meeting the needs of young people who are at risk of not completing Year 12 to a satisfactory level.

Please list the key ways in which you believe your project/program is achieving this purpose.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Question 4

Please list the kinds of 'at risk' factors/behaviours shown by students that led to recruiting them for the Full Service Schools project/program in your school.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Question 5

Is your Full Service School project/program designed to attract early school leavers back into education and training?

Please tick one of the boxes below.

☐ Yes ☐ No

If "No", please go to Question 7.

If "Yes", please list the key elements of your program that you believe are/would be attractive to this group.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Question 6

If your program caters for young people who left school, how did you locate them?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Question 7

Please list any mechanisms for tracking exit students used by your school or other organisations or agencies in your region.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Question 8

Please list the most useful support networks and other resources in your region that you believe assist 'at risk' young people to stay or return to education and training.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Question 9

Please list the most useful formal links that your program has established or intends to establish with other local agencies, programs or organisations in your region.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Question 10

What is *your estimate* of the proportion of students at risk of dropping out of school (in your school)? *Please tick one box below.*

- ☐ 1 less than 10%
- ☐ 2 10-20%
- ☐ 3 20-30%
- ☐ 4 30-40%
- ☐ 5 40-50%
- ☐ 6 50%+

Question 11

Please list the key reasons that you believe contribute to students dropping out of school in your school.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Question 12

Please list key strategies and influencing factors that have reduced students dropping out of your school.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Question 13

Please list any early indicators that the project/program in your school is improving chances of retaining 'at risk' students.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Thank you for your time and effort in completing this questionnaire.

Please return your completed questionnaire by **17 March** to:

Associate Professor Kevin Ward
Centre for Human Resource Development and Training
Faculty of Education
The University of Melbourne
Locked Bag 12
Hawthorn 3122.
Fax: (03) 9810 3170

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

Invitation to participate in a regional action research team

If you would like to participate in an action research team to improve opportunities for young people to participate in education and training in your region, please provide the following details and return this form with your completed questionnaire.

Contact Name:

_____

School/Organisation:

_____

Name of Full Service Schools project/s (in your school):

_____

_____

Telephone: _____

Fax: _____

Email: _____

Thank you for your interest in joining this project

Please return your completed expression of interest by **17 March** to:

Associate Professor Kevin Ward
Centre for Human Resource Development and Training
Faculty of Education
The University of Melbourne
Locked Bag 12
Hawthorn 3122.
Fax: (03) 9810 3170

APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE TWO

FULL SERVICE SCHOOLS PROGRAM VICTORIAN STATEWIDE EVALUATION, OCTOBER 2000

(Please return by 31 October)

The purpose of this survey is to investigate:

- what has been achieved through the FSS Program as a whole and within local communities;
- factors that have influenced the outcomes of particular FSS programs;
- ways in which the knowledge and experience gained from the FSS Program may be applied to reduce early school leaving; and
- what participant teachers and other personnel have gained from participating in the Action Research component of this evaluation.

Area Network in which Full Service School Project is located

1 Brimbank/Hume
2 Casey/Dandenong
3 Darebin/Moreland
4 Frankston/Peninsula
5 Ballarat
6 Bendigo
7 East Gippsland/Latrobe/Wellington
8 Greater Geelong

Which Best Describes School Location?

1 Metropolitan
2 Provincial
3 Rural

What is your main role in the school?

1 Principal/Senior Administrator
2. Student Welfare Coordinator
3 Careers Coordinator
4 VET Coordinator
5 Classroom teacher
6 FSS Coordinator
7 Other (please specify):
.....

Education System or Sector

1 Government
2 Catholic
3 Independent
4 Other .....

Program outcomes

1. What were the intended outcomes of your FSS program?

	Don't know	Not at all	A little	Moderately achieved	Significantly achieved
2 To what extent did your program achieve its intended outcomes?					

Measuring outcomes

3 Listed below are a number of outcomes that have been identified as measures of effectiveness of FSS programs/projects. To what extent has your FSS program/project achieved each of the following outcomes?

	Don't know/ NA	Not at all	A little	Moderately achieved	Significantly achieved
3.1 Retention rates have increased.					
3.2 Attendance rates have increased.					
3.3 Students have a more positive attitude to learning.					
3.4 Students have improved social/life skills.					
3.5 Students have increased self esteem.					
3.6 Students have improved literacy skills.					
3.7 Students have improved numeracy skills.					
3.8 Students have moved on to/are seeking further education or training.					
3.9 Students have moved on to/are seeking employment.					
3.10 Please list any other important student outcomes.					

3.10.1 _____

3.10.2 _____

3.10.3 _____

4 Please give us examples of evidence you used to measure the outcomes listed above.

Outcome	Examples of evidence
4.1 Retention rates have increased.	
4.2 Attendance rates have increased.	
4.3 Students have a more positive attitude to learning.	
4.4 Students have improved social/life skills.	
4.5 Students have increased self-esteem.	
4.6 Students have improved literacy skills.	
4.7 Students have improved numeracy skills.	
4.8 Students have moved on to/are seeking further education or training.	
4.9 Students have moved on to/are seeking employment.	
4.10 Other important student outcomes.	

Factors impacting on outcomes

5 What were the positive factors that impacted on the effectiveness of your program/project?

5.1 In the school:

_____

_____

_____

_____

5.2 External to the school:

6 What were the negative factors that impacted on the effectiveness of your program/project?

6.1 In the school:

6.2 External to the school:

School organisation and processes

Please tick the boxes below that best represent your school's current situation.

	Don't know/ NA	No development	Early stages of devt	Developing well	Significantly achieved
7 Increased range of curriculum options or activities for 'at risk' students.					

Please give some examples:

	Don't know/ NA	No development	Early stages of devt	Developing well	Significantly achieved
8 The FSS program is integrated into the mainstream curriculum ie. a whole school approach to students 'at risk'.					

Please give some examples:

Don't know/ NA	No development	Early stages of devt	Developing well	Significantly achieved

9 Teachers now work more effectively with students 'at risk'.
Please give some examples:

_____

_____

_____

Don't know/ NA	No development	Early stages of devt	Developing well	Significantly achieved

10 School organisation and procedures have changed to meet the needs of 'at risk' students (eg. Flexible arrangements for the delivery of programs such as on/off campus programs; block timetabling; different times, places; curriculum choices; using multimedia/internet/chat lines; distance education? Please give some examples:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Don't know/ NA	No development	Early stages of devt	Developing well	Significantly achieved

11 Procedures are in place to identify potential early school leavers.
Please give some examples:

_____

_____

_____

Don't know/ NA	No development	Early stages of devt	Developing well	Significantly achieved

12 Assessment methods and systems are appropriate for monitoring progress of 'at risk' students.
Please give some examples:

_____

_____

_____

Don't know/ NA	No development	Early stages of devt	Developing well	Significantly achieved

13 Procedures are in place in the school or region to 'track' early school leavers when they leave. Please give some examples:

_____

_____

_____

Networks

Feedback from Survey 1 and the focus groups has indicated that the establishment of effective links with other agencies has been an important factor in the success of many FSS programs.

Don't know/ NA	No development	Early stages of devt	Developing well	Significantly achieved

14 There is increased community agency and service support for students 'at risk' and early school leavers.
Please give some examples:

_____

_____

15 What NEW links and cooperative arrangements with services and/or agencies have been developed as a result of the FSS Program?

_____

_____

_____

Don't know/ NA	No development	Early stages of devt	Developing well	Significantly achieved

15.1 At what stage of development are these cooperative arrangements?

15.2 What enabled or facilitated the development of these cooperative arrangements?

_____

_____

_____

16 Many schools have established collaborative arrangements between schools or other education and training providers to address the needs of the potential early leavers. Please briefly describe any arrangements between your school and other providers in the region.

_____

_____

_____

_____

	Don't know/ NA	No development	Early stages of devt	Developing well	Significantly achieved
16.1 At what stage of development are these collaborative arrangements?					

16.3 What enabled or facilitated the development of these collaborative arrangements?

Recognition of students' participation/completion

17 Did/will students receive a Certificate or other qualification? ☐ Yes ☐ No *(Please tick)*

17.1 Did the students receive this recognition/award at a presentation or local ceremony? ☐ Yes ☐ No *(Please tick)*

17.2 Please list and describe any formal qualifications awarded/to be awarded.

Developing employability

18 Did your program involve work placement for the students? ☐ Yes ☐ No *(Please tick)*
If **'yes'**, was the work placement:

18.1 a *structured work place* learning experience? ☐ Yes ☐ No *(Please tick)*

Or

18.2 a *non-structured* opportunity for students to experience a work environment? ☐ Yes ☐ No *(Please tick)*

Please provide a brief description below:

19 Please list employability skills or attributes that you believe students developed as a result of your program.

20 What activities or arrangements have you found most useful to enable potential early school leavers to develop these skills and attributes?

21 Following on from your above comments, what recommendations would you make to policy makers regarding future programs to reduce youth unemployment in the region?

Action Research Teams in the FSS Program

22 Did you participate as an action research team member? ☐ Yes ☐ No *(Please tick)*

If **'Yes'** Please indicate how useful this process was in assisting you to achieve your program's intended (and unintended) outcomes.

Not at all useful	Of some use	Very useful

23 Please list any barriers that prevented you participating fully in the Action Research process.

24 What were the personal benefits of participating in the Action Research process?

25 Please list the benefits of participating in the Action Research process for your program.

26 What advice would you give to school or agency personnel who might consider participating in an action research program to improve outcomes for potential early school leavers?

Don't know/	Definitely not	Unlikely	Likely	Certain to continue

27 To what extent is the work of your Action Research likely to continue in 2001?
Please give reasons:

Impact of FFS Program

Don't know/	No sustainable	Sustainable to some extent	Mostly sustainable	Highly sustainable

28 To what extent are the activities initiated in the FSS program sustainable after FSS funding ceases.
Please give reasons:

29 What has the FSS Program enabled you to achieve that may not otherwise have occurred?

30 Throughout this project we have learned about many success stories concerning students 'at risk' and early school leavers for whom the FSS program has made a difference to their wellbeing and engagement in learning and/or focus on future directions in further education and training or employment.

We would be delighted if you would briefly describe a program that has been particularly helpful in this regard, or a case study of a particular young person (no names) for whom your FSS Program has made a significant difference.

Thank you for your time and contribution to this important project.

APPENDIX 2: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS FOR AREA NETWORK COMMITTEES

Full Service Schools Program Victorian Statewide Evaluation

(Approximately 1 hour)

1. What are some categories of local services and support agencies that seem to make a difference?
2. How do they make a difference?
3. How do you make school-agency links work?
4. What are some good ways of tracking early school leavers and maintaining contact with them?
5. What kind of resources and structures are needed to do this?
6. We know from earlier research and from what FSS people are telling us that school culture is an important factor in either engaging or 'turning students off' school. (Survey Results: Absenteeism 50, low motivation 44, academic failure 42, low skill levels 29, boredom 27) How can these problems be addressed effectively?
7. What can teachers do that makes a difference to maintaining students in mainstream curriculum?
8. In relation to future planning for your specific programs, what are or should be the next steps?
9. In relation to future planning for this cluster, what should be the next steps?

APPENDIX 3: STUDENT FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

For facilitators

The following questions are presented as a guide only and are not meant to constrain you, for example, if you wish to follow up issues of particular importance to students or proceed in a different order from that presented here. You may also wish to re-word some of the questions, as appropriate to a particular group of students, or omit some questions that have already been answered.

QUESTION SCHEDULE (approximately half an hour)

Reasons for entry into the program

1. What attracted/brought you into this program?
2. How did you think it differed from alternatives on offer (if by choice)?

The program

3. What did you expect to gain from the program?
4. To what extent is the program meeting those expectations?
5. What has encouraged you to remain in the program?
6. How is it different from other programs in your school?
7. What do you like about the program (e.g. activities/content/structural arrangements/location/personnel etc.)?
8. What might you wish to change about the program?

Learning

9. What, so far, has been the most important learning for you in this program (e.g. development of new skills, knowledge, attitudes, confidence etc.)?
10. What are you hoping to learn from it in the near future?
11. What aspects of the program have helped your learning most?
12. What would help you to learn more effectively in the program?

Future directions

13. What do you intend to do next year and is this in any way related to the program?
14. Is there anything else about your experiences in this program that you would like to comment upon?

APPENDIX 4: FULL SERVICE SCHOOLS PARTICIPATING IN THE EVALUATION

Bairnsdale Secondary College
Bellarine Secondary College
Bendigo Senior Secondary College
Box Forest Secondary College
Brunswick Secondary College
Castlemaine Secondary College
Catholic Regional College Geelong
Cleeland Secondary College
Collingwood College
Covenant College Bell Post Hill
Deer Park Secondary College
Eaglehawk Secondary College
Erinbank Secondary College
Fawkner Secondary College
Flora Hill Secondary College
Geelong High School
Hampton Park Secondary College
John Paul College Frankston
Kealba Secondary College
Killester College
Lakeside Secondary College
Loreto College
Lyndhurst Secondary College
Maribynong Secondary College
Mercy Diocesan College
Merrilands P12 College
Mornington Secondary College
Mount Erin Secondary College
Norlane High School
Northland Secondary College
Pakenham Secondary College
Penola College Broadmeadows
Reservoir District Secondary College
Sale College
Sunbury Secondary College
Swifts Creek Secondary College
Upfield Secondary College
Western Heights Secondary College
Beaufort Secondary College
Belmont High School
Berwick Secondary College
Broadmeadows Secondary College
Carwatha College
Catholic College Sale
Catholic Regional College Traralgon
Clonard College
Corio Community College
Daylesford Secondary College
Doveton Secondary College
East Loddon College
Eumemerring Secondary College
Flinders Peak Secondary College
Frankston High School
Grovedale Secondary College
Hillcrest Secondary College
Karingal Park Secondary College
Kensington Community High School
Kurnai College
Langwarrin Secondary College
Lowanna College
Marian College Sunshine West
Maryborough Regional College
Monterey Secondary College
Moreland Secondary College
Mount Eliza Secondary College
Newcombe Secondary College
North Geelong Secondary School
Oberon High School
Patterson River Secondary College
Presentation Regional College Moe
Rosebud Secondary College
Sebastopol Secondary College
Sunbury Downs Secondary College
Thornbury Darebin Secondary College
Weeroona College

APPENDIX 5: QUESTIONNAIRE PARTICIPATION STATISTICS

FSS Area Network of respondents to questionnaires

	1st Survey March 2000		2nd Survey October 2000	
Area Network	**No. of Respondents**	**Overall Percentage**	**No. of Respondents**	**Overall Percentage**
Brimbank/Hume	13	17.8%	14	17.5%
Casey/Dandenong	7	9.6%	12	15%
Darebin/Moreland	6	8.2%	6	7.5%
Frankston/Peninsula	14	19.2%	10	12.5%
Ballarat	1	1.4%	6	7.5%
Bendigo	7	9.6%	7	8.8%
East Gippsland/				
Latrobe/Wellington	13	17.8%	10	12.5%
Greater Geelong	12	16.4%	15	18.7%
Total	**73**	**100%**	**80**	**100%**

School location of respondents

	1st Survey March 2000		2nd Survey October 2000	
Area Network	**No. of Respondents**	**Overall Percentage**	**No. of Respondents**	**Overall Percentage**
Metropolitan	39	53.4%	37	50.7%
Provincial	19	26%	28	38.3%
Rural	15	20.6%	8	11%
Total	**73**	**100**	**73**	**100%**
Not shown	1		7	
Total	**74**		**80**	

Education system represented by respondents

	1st Survey March 2000		2nd Survey October 2000	
Area Network	**No. of Respondents**	**Overall Percentage**	**No. of Respondents**	**Overall Percentage**
Government	62	86%	62	81.6%
Catholic	8	11%	11	14.5%
Independent	1	1.4%	1	1.3%
Other	1	1.4%	2	2.6%
Total	**72**	**100%**	**76**	**100%**
Not shown	1	4		
Total	**73**	**80**		

Main role in school of respondents

	1st Survey March 2000		2nd Survey October 2000	
Area Network	**No. of Respondents**	**Overall Percentage**	**No. of Respondents**	**Overall Percentage**
Principal/Sen.Admin	21	29.6%	25	32.5%
FSS Coordinator	6	8.5%	22	28.6%
Other Coordination	37	52%	22	28.6%
***Other**	7	9.9%	8	10.3%
Total	**71**	**100%**	**77**	**100%**
Not shown	3		3	
Total	**74**		**80**	

Please note that 'Other' includes classroom teachers and other listed responsibilities not nominated as coordination roles.

APPENDIX 6: SUMMARY OF QUANTITATIVE DATA FROM QUESTIONNAIRE TWO

Overall percentage responses to each of the 'selected-response' items in the October 2000 questionnaire are presented below.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

	Don't know/NA	Not at all	A little	Moderately achieved	Significantly achieved
Q 2. To what extent did your program achieve its intended outcomes? (n= 74)			6.8	31.1	62.2

MEASURING OUTCOMES

Q 3. To what extent has your FSS program/project achieved each of the following outcomes?	Don't	Not at all know/NA	A little	Moderately achieved	Significantly achieved
3.1 Retention rates have increased (n= 74)	9.5	5.4	10.8	48.6	25.7
3.2 Attendance rates have increased (n= 74)	5.4	2.7	16.2	41.9	33.8
3.3 Students have a more positive attitude to learning (n= 75)	1.3		12	44	42.7
3.4 Students have improved social/ life skills (n= 75)			10.7	45.3	44
3.5 Students have increased self esteem (n=75)	1.4		11.1	45.8	41.7
3.6 Students have improved literacy skills (n= 71)	16.9	4.2	28.2	45.1	5.6
3.7 Students have improved numeracy skills (n= 70)	20	5.7	31.4	35.7	7.1
3.8 Students have moved on to/are seeking further education and training (n= 72)	4.2	1.4	18.1	40.3	36.1
3.9 Students have moved on to/are seeking employment (n= 71)	5.6	5.6	26.8	36.6	25.4

SCHOOL ORGANISATION AND PROCESSES

	Don't know/NA	Not at all	A little	Moderately achieved	Significantly achieved
Q 7. Increased range of curriculum options or activities for 'at risk' students. (n= 69)	1.4		24.6	46.4	27.5
Q 8. The FSS program is integrated into the mainstream curriculum ie. a whole school approach to students 'at risk'. (n= 69)	1.4	8.7	37.7	29	23.2
Q 9. Teachers now work more effectively with students 'at risk'. (n= 69)	1.4	2.9	40.6	43.5	11.6
Q 10. School organisation and procedures have changed to meet the needs of 'at risk' students. (n= 70)	1.4	5.7	30	45.7	17.1
Q 11. Procedures are in place to identify potential early school leavers. (n= 68)	2.9	7.4	22.1	48.5	19.1
Q 12. Assessment methods and systems are appropriate for monitoring progress of 'at risk' students. (n= 69)	4.3	15.9	24.6	42	13
Q 13 Procedures are in place in the school or region to 'track' early school leavers when they leave. (n= 66)	9.1	15.2	48.5	22.7	4.5

NETWORKS

	Don't know/NA	Not at all	A little	Moderately achieved	Significantly achieved
Q 14. There is increased community agency and service support for students 'at risk' and early school leavers. (n= 69)	2.8	1.4	22.5	53.5	19.7
Q 15.1. At what stage of development are these cooperative arrangements (with services and/or agencies)? (n= 68)	4.4	5.9	23.5	54.4	11.8
Q 16.1. At what stage of development are these collaborative arrange-ments (between schools etc)? (n= 65)	3.1	4.6	24.6	50.8	16.9

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RECOGNITION OF STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION/COMPLETION

	Yes	No
Q 17. Did/will students receive a Certificate or other qualification? (n= 72)	77.4	22.6
Q 17.1. Did the students receive this recognition/award at a presentation or local ceremony? (n= 56)	55.4	44.6

DEVELOPING EMPLOYABILITY

	Yes	No
Q 18. Did your program involve work placement for the students? (n= 71)	81.7	18.3
Q 18.1. Was the work placement a structured work place learning experience? (n= 57)	71.9	28.1
Q 18.2. Was the work placement a non-structured opportunity for students to experience a work environment? (n= 43)	81.4	18.6

ACTION RESEARCH TEAMS IN THE FSS PROGRAM

	Yes	No			
Q 22. Did you participate as an action research team member? (n= 69)	26.1	73.9			
	Not at all useful	Of some use	Very useful		
Q 22(a) If 'Yes' please indicate how useful this process was in assisting you to achieve your program's intended (and unintended) outcomes. (n= 18)	16.7	44.4	38.9		
	Don't know	Definitely not	Unlikely	Likely	Certain to continue
Q 27 To what extent is the work of your Action Research likely to continue in 2001? (n= 22)	31.8	9.1	36.4	9.1	13.6

IMPACT OF FSS PROGRAM

	Don't know	Not sustainable	Sustainable to some extent	Mostly sustainable	Highly sustainable
Q 28 To what extent are the activities initiated in the FSS program sustainable after FSS funding ceases? (n= 70)	1.4	34.3	40	21.4	2.9

Numbers in columns represent percentages. Read across table in rows (100%).

APPENDIX 7: LIST OF EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

The following employability skills were mentioned by respondents to the second questionnaire as those being developed through alternative programs.

Personal development

- Improved confidence, self-esteem and sense of worth e.g. '[realising] that they do have skills and can work hard'; self-reliance; 'believing in themselves'; sense of achievement; confidence in approaching community organisations.
- Clearer sense of direction.
- Perseverance e.g. 'turning up every day'.
- Personal organisation e.g. 'recognising that punctuality is important'; time management; reliability; planning.
- Communication, assertiveness and people/social/interpersonal skills e.g. 'they had to work cooperatively with people they did not know'; more outgoing; able to relate to adults better; 'increased ability in relaxed conversation with potential employers'; confidence to use the telephone.
- Decision-making, independence; goal setting; resilience; initiative; flexibility; adaptability; maturity; respect for others, tolerance; ability to identify transferable skills; pride in appearance; hope and optimism; critical evaluation.
- Problem-solving skills e.g. 'working through issues'.
- Ability to analyse e.g. 'looking at something and working out what's important'.
- Improved literacy and numeracy.

General work skills and knowledge

- Better understanding of the reality of work and the work place, employer expectations e.g. 'realising that paid work environments expect people to be responsible and answerable to superiors', and responsibilities of employees.
- More job wise/work ready e.g. understanding resume preparation, job applications, interview skills, presentation, 'what employers look for'.
- Working as part of a team; following instructions; working to a routine; being responsible for their own contributions; positive attitude to work and the work ethic; leadership.
- Improved computer literacy skills; technology skills.
- Presentation skills; public speaking.

Specific work skills and knowledge

- Pre-employment/pre-apprenticeship and recognised industry skills.
- Occupational health and safety.
- Dealing with the public.
- Industry-specific/hands-on skills e.g. in hospitality, woodwork, welding, office administration.
- Certificate 1, First Aid.

Skills for staying on at school

- Improved task completion ability and concentration e.g. 'modules completed (provide) better proof of employability'.
- More focused on setting and achieving goals at school e.g. 'To pass Year 10 to be able to go on to further education'; increased attendance at school.
- Ability to relate school to work.
- Improved behaviour e.g. 'awareness of balance between rights, privileges, expectations and responsibilities'; anger management.
- Academic improvement; self-directed learning; 'cognitive strategies for approaching the different types of assessment tasks in the VCE'.
- Improved motivation e.g. 'doing the best they can/caring about the results'.

APPENDIX 8: SPECIFIC STRATEGIES FOR MONITORING STUDENT PROGRESS

Specific strategies that FSS Program personnel believe are working (according to responses to the second questionnaire) are listed below. Various combinations of these may contribute to a multifaceted approach.

Alternative assessment methods

- Negotiated assessment with individual students to provide success.
- Student journals (weekly) to identify concerns.
- Self-evaluation surveys and 'feedback ... for students on performance in a timely manner'.
- Self-monitoring 'period by period behaviour sheets'.
- Competency-based and 'task oriented' assessment.
- Internal certificates of completion to serve as milestones of achievement e.g. VCE Study Management.

Regular and specific reporting

- A specific report/certificate system designed especially for an alternative program.
- Short term goals (set fortnightly) and written reports for all students.
- Immediate referral of 'students who are struggling or not completing work' to year level coordinators.
- Regular reporting (intervals varied from weekly – 'in a "fill out" procedure' for teachers – to every six weeks) 'noting attendance and overdue work to alert staff and parents to potential problems'.
- Regular staff meetings for notification of at risk students (varied from twice a year to 'numerous times') with follow-up contact with parents, counselling for students and reviews of their workload and subjects. It was also noted that 'observation of students in and out of class' may be easier in small schools.
- Computerised attendance records to identify absenteeism.

Screening students at school entry or at the point of referral to youth support programs

- Screening students for at risk factors on enrolment or at the point of referral to other programs e.g. using ACER tests for literacy, numeracy and general ability.
- Using 'summaries' of students from 'feeder schools' to identify problems, learning difficulties and risk factors.
- Examining individual reports to identify problems.

Collaborative approaches

- Working closely with subject and curriculum coordinators.
- Involving parents in developing 'a united approach'.
- Comprehensive case management (may be done in collaboration with external youth support agencies e.g. BAYSA who advocate close liaison between youth support workers, student welfare coordinators, staff and parents).
- Program evaluation to ensure students' needs are being met.
- Evaluation of programs that included feedback from parents, students, teachers and participating agencies.

APPENDIX 9: GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

ACCI	Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
ACE	Adult and Community Education
ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
ANTA	Australian National Training Authority
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
BATFORCE	Barwon Adolescent Taskforce
BAYSA	Barwon Area Youth Services and Accommodation
BSSC	Bendigo Senior Secondary College
CSF	Curriculum and Standards Framework
CGEA	Certificate of General Education for Adults
CPCET	Centre for Post Compulsory Education and Training
CRT	Casual Relief Teacher
CSP	Community Support Program
CWE	Certificate of Work Education
LSP	Local Support Program
DEET	Department of Education, Employment and Training
DETYA	Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs
ENTER	Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank
GBGT	Greater Bendigo Group Training
IT	Information Technology
JPP	Jobs Pathway Programme
JPET	Job Placement Employment and Training
KLA	Key Learning Area
LLEN	Local Learning and Employment Network
MARS	Motivation and Retention of Students
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OWE	Options for Work and Education
PE	Physical Education
PEAK	Practical Education and Knowledge
PEAL	Preparation for Education and Life

PD	Professional Development
SSSP	Senior Students Support Project
STAR	Students-At-Risk Program
SWC	Student Welfare Coordinator
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
WHO	World Health Organisation
VCE	Victorian Certificate of Education
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VETIS	VET in Schools
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

ISBN 0 7594 0184 5

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